Living Transition: Stories of Resiliency (A Heuristic Study)

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ABSTRACT

LIVING TRANSITION: STORIES OF RESILIENCY (A HEURISTIC STUDY)

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The goal of this study sought to understand the experience of membership in the Transition movement through exploration of narratives shared by Transition Guelph participants. Using a heuristic research approach, this study begins by sharing the researcher’s story to gain insight into their personal experience of the movement. Then, a review of existing Transition literature seeds a foundation for the reader and provides context to further our understanding of individual experiences of this movement. While the origins, principles, and impacts of Transition are thoroughly explored in the literature, reference to individual transformational change and building personal resilience is less well documented. Thus, this study explores members’ inner journeys and experiences of the Transition movement through the sharing of their stories, thereby filling this gap in existing literature. “The 4 I’s: Development of Personal Resiliency Model” is created to capture and explain the transformational change and lived experience of Transition members.
As each of the contributors to this study gained a deeper sense of self and purpose through their participation in the Transition movement, so too did I grow and develop through my research. I was able to complete this journey with the love and support of so many people. To my dear parents who never ceased to listen when I needed it the most, and to their on-going support and wisdom as I enter the next chapter of my life - I am forever grateful! To my beautiful partner, who grounds me, cares for me, keeps me laughing, and never stops loving me through this meandering journey - thank you for all that you are and all that you do. Thank you to my brother for assisting me in the design aspects of this thesis, and to my sister for being a constant source of joy. And to my extended family and mentors who enveloped me with love and acknowledgement when I needed it the most - I couldn’t have done it without you. To my dear friends (you know who you are) who provided encouragement when I was lost, a glass of wine when I needed to relax and let loose, and the motivation I needed to gain local knowledge and “flawlessly execute” this chapter of my life; thank you for being there for me every step of the way. Thanks to my dear advisor for helping me untangle the big ideas spinning in my head, for helping me to trust my instincts and for showing me that research can be created in a meaningful and authentic way. Thank you to Shared Value Solutions for providing an excellent and productive working environment throughout the final weeks of this study - I couldn’t have survived without the laughter and strong cups of coffee! Finally, thank you to the contributors of this research and the Transition Guelph community - your hearts are so big, your souls are so generous, and your stories are rich. This study would not have come into being with you. I appreciate you all so much and value this warm community I call home.
Welcome, and thanks for joining me on this journey. For me, this study runs deeper and is more meaningful than any other study I’ve completed before. This research was co-created with members of the Transition movement, and more specifically, Transition Guelph. As I too have walked my own journey in this movement, I feel the depth and breadth of the stories shared wholeheartedly. This study is a reflection of the vibrant and diverse Transition community in Guelph, and aims to understand the wider human experience of membership in this movement. The research stems from my autobiography and own personal history - through my involvement in Transition I have found a sense of belonging, discovered balance, and have built an inner resiliency in myself to respond to outer upsets. Transition, and the community it involves, has offered me a rich, new, participatory life.

This thesis posed one of the greatest challenges to me as a researcher. I merely began this expedition with a recognition that I wanted to study the topic of Transition and my own experience of the movement. Distinct from those two qualities, I had no direction or idea of where I wanted to venture. In hindsight, I think this was a benefit to the research, as it inspired the opportunity for exploration in whatever emerged. I chose to use a phenomenological framework to aid my understanding of the ‘lived experience’ of Transition. This, coupled with Moustaka’s framework of heuristic research, gave me a platform to explore and co-create the research while also gaining a deeper sense of self and meaning in my own experience.
It is important to note that the writing of this thesis occurred quite backwards given that I did not know which direction to begin in. I intuitively commenced with a complete and comprehensive overview of the Transition movement, so that I could become well-acquainted with its origins, purpose, principles, impacts, and outcomes. Reflecting back, it gave me the foundation I needed in order to kick-start my creativity in how I would frame the questions asked to participants. For instance, the literature briefly dabbled in Transition’s ability to support the inner changes that occurred in individuals through their processing of outer impacts (like environmental degradation or economic collapse), and I was curious to flesh this concept out more by understanding how people experienced this on a day-to-day basis. I craved to know their inner journeys of transformation and how they experienced themselves through Transition.

Once I had completed the oral histories with the participants and they collaborated on co-creating and publishing their stories, I gained a nuanced understanding of the literature which I had previously reviewed. It was then that I had to un-learn and re-learn my purpose for this study. I had to re-define the purpose of the literature review and re-evaluate the overall structure of this thesis so that it would convey my new aim: to share my own story of Transition; provide a fundamental overview of the movement to the reader; and then present and analyze each contributor’s story to discover their experiences and transformations within the movement.

I feel that discovery through self-inquiry and inner-exploration is significant, as so much conventional research takes a ‘participant vs. researcher’ approach. The type of research approach I took in this study lies on the premise that humans make meaning out of experiences,
and to understand these meanings can lead to understanding human behaviours. It involves the researcher telling his or her own story in order to understand others’ experiences.

And so, this thesis begins with my story (which took an act of courage, as I have never fully shared the intimate details of my life with many people, let alone publish it front and centre). Sharing my story acts as a “starting off point” and is used to apply to understanding a wider context (the Transition movement). The second part of this thesis delves into a comprehensive review of existing Transition literature so that the reader has a holistic understanding of this movement. Then, we move into exploring the ins and outs of this study, and end with a presentation, analysis and discussion of participants’ oral histories. Through the steps of i) sharing the researcher’s story; ii) exploring the literature and; iii) valuing and understanding the depth of the contributions made by each participant through their stories, a blended description and knowledge of the research is created, thereby answering the question, *what is the lived experience of membership in the Transition movement?*

Through this research and my involvement in the Transition community (in which many meaningful relationships were built), I have experienced the possibility of our future as connected and collaborative beings. This feeling is captured beautifully in Clark Moustaka’s 1967 composition, *Creativity and Conformity*;

In the creative human relationship, there is a feeling that soars beyond the limits of self-awareness and into the heart of another person. There is a feeling of oneness, a feeling of communion (Moustakas, 1967, p. 138).
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I had a rich childhood - full of laughter, adventure, and people that loved me. I grew up in a German-speaking household in the suburbs of Kitchener. Contrary to the traditional concept of ‘suburbs’, our end of town was filled with a conservation area that spilled into our neighbourhood. We had forests, creeks and paths at our fingertips, which for a seven year old, meant endless days building forts and catching cray fish in the creek with my brother. I fostered a strong connection to nature at a young age, and deepening this connection has been a part of my daily practice ever since.

I grew up as the middle child, with a fierce and creative older brother, and a sweet and curious younger sister. My parents treated us all equal and nurtured our sense of adventure. We were raised with strong family values - to love everyone equally, to share, to communicate when things went wrong, to eat well, and sing often. Most summers we journeyed across Canada in our little red van, camping along the way - we alternated between visiting the West and East coasts, and in the spring or winter would travel to my mother’s small village in Germany.

My father grew up in a Russian Mennonite family and his parents fled the second world war. They were sponsored by the Mennonite church to immigrate safely to Canada, and because of this, spent the rest of their days deeply grateful to the Mennonite religion. My father’s generation deviated and, when he was a young man, had no interest in following his parents’ ideals. He met my mother in Nicaragua during the Revolution in the 1980’s while carrying out
development work and when he brought her to Canada they decided to become rooted in southern Ontario, build a family and embody alternative living as much as they could.

As a new immigrant to Canada, my mother felt a deep yearning for community, and so my parents sought out a church community that was congruent to their values. They stumbled upon Olive Branch Mennonite Church - a colourful denomination comprised of progressive adults who withdrew from the more-conservative Mennonite church to create their own, more alternative, spiritual gathering. Olive Branch was made up of people from all different ethnic backgrounds, sexualities, income brackets, ages, and genders. For me as a child and later a young person, I loved it. It never felt like church. It felt like I would gather with dozens of families every week to sing, play, and eat. The church organized in a collective leadership model - there was no minister, but rather, all of the adults would alternate leading ceremony. We sang and celebrated and after service would share a bountiful potluck. I grew up blind to race, sexuality, and economic status in this community. The elders made the bible stories meaningful to me through sharing, storytelling, and question-answering. Reflecting back now, attending Olive Branch was one of the things that shaped me the most into who I am today.

In high school, I felt pulled to become engaged with meaningful activities which allowed me to express myself creatively. I joined the sustainability club, edited the school newspaper, acted in musicals, traveled to Kenya with a development organization, and was elected School President in my final year of high school. It was a colourful and vibrant experience.
When I finished high school, I was accepted at The University of Guelph to study International Development, and I chose to focus my studies on rural agricultural development. This education deepened my understanding of and appreciation for human and natural systems. I also met a friendly group of young Mennonites and for the first time in my life was welcomed in because of my ‘Mennonite’ label. The first year of those relationships were filled with new energy - I thought I had finally found a sense of belonging.

Things shifted in the second year, and by the third year, I felt lost, confused and angry. What I thought was a loving, inclusive community was nothing more than an exclusive ‘club’ with pretentious tendencies. After so many years of striving to fit in, I had completely lost track of who I was. I started blaming my family for not raising me in a more traditional Mennonite home - in hindsight, I was viewing my family how I thought I was being viewed by my Mennonite “friends”. The hurt and anger for having to hustle for approval were reaching a boiling point.

I decided to enrol on a semester abroad to Guatemala, where I volunteered at a small organic farm that led skill-building workshops for indigenous women. I felt connected to this new land and its people. I became fluent in Spanish and I even stayed longer and traveled with some amazing women who were also in my program. We backpacked through central America, creating our own adventures and forming lasting memories. There was freedom in living out my authenticity - these women got to know me as me, and it felt amazing.
Upon our return to Canada, life went on. Except this time, I was living out some strange split-personality disorder. Around my Guatemala friends, I was me - happy, free-spirited, feisty, silly. Around the Mennonites and my partner at the time, I was dull, a pleaser, uninspired. I knew that I had to make a change - I had to get some creative energy back into my life and find a way to live that felt authentic and meaningful to me.

I received a job at a downtown vegetarian restaurant at the pinnacle of Guelphite life and, shortly after, moved into a downtown apartment. I didn’t expect this change to shift my life so much, but immediately I was warmly welcomed into the dynamic and colourful downtown Guelph community. Many of the people I met were a part of Transition Guelph, and meeting them inspired my involvement in this organization.

I was so elated that I had found the Transition lifestyle of self care, earth care, and fair share, and the community it created. It felt so familiar to me, a feeling of coming home. When I made the decision to shift my lifestyle, the entire floodgates bursted open and in poured music, support, laughter and community. I officially joined Transition Guelph and found true community again. I felt re-connected to myself, re-connected to nature, and found meaning in my work. I met a man that I deeply love and respect for who he is, and he, the same for me. In the last four years I have experienced a re-birth of vitality. An eagerness for learning, which I am living out now through completion of an M.Sc. in Capacity Development & Extension; a passion for people that I am experiencing through my work as a community-based researcher; a vigour
for exploring my connection to Spirit through music; and an excitement for building resiliency, both in myself and in how I live my life.

My work with Transition Guelph has been a learning curve. It has its ups and downs like volunteering in any not-for-profit organization would. I have had the opportunity to create a documentary about TG, I am now a Transition Streets facilitator (TS is a program where neighbourhood groups come together and talk about what they can do on an everyday basis to build resilient communities and reduce their carbon footprint), and I have facilitated workshops and attended many community lectures.

For me, Transition is both an inner and outer process. It has been an inner journey for me through building my own resiliency and capacities to ensure I am balanced, living creatively, and making decisions that reflect my intuition and authenticity. Transition is also outer work, as in, it is the work I am engaged with on an everyday work basis. With this work comes an entire different level of bureaucratic challenges. Decision-making and understanding structure in a non-hierarchical organization can be exhausting. I have felt burnt out at times through my involvement with TG. It is challenging to get things done in this organization; at times there seems to be “too many chefs in the kitchen” and it is overwhelming, and other times, I have experienced a lack of support.

However, with all of these frustrations comes boughs of love and appreciation. I appreciate that I am able to be who I want to be in this organization, and that I can flow in and
flow out according to my schedule. Working within TG feels like there are limitless opportunities. Yes, there may not be ample financial support available, but I have never met a group of more thoughtful, creative, and innovative thinkers who can catalyze change so quickly. They truly are turning Guelph into a model city for the sustainability movement, and they can make anything happen.

I am excited for the future. I feel enlivened about my field of study - although my career path seems foggy, I know that it will lie within community-based research, education and resiliency of some sort. I feel excited for the TG community to keep expanding. I am deeply grateful to move forward in my marriage with my partner and look forward to using the practical permaculture skills I have learned in Transition to guide my future in motherhood and homesteading. This is the community that I want to raise my children in, just as I had when I was with Olive Branch. It seems as if everything has come full circle in a sense. I am back to where I started - with a strong family, loving people in my life, full of adventure and creativity. My path so far has been meandering, but I have gained knowledge and experience on each step of the way. I look forward to future twists and turns in the road as I continue my journey.
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction/ Background

The Transition Movement was created in 2006 by a group of concerned citizens in Totnes, England, in the face of climate change and peak oil. They came together and created an alternative way of living in response to environmental destruction and social, economic, and spiritual degradation. Thus, “Transition” was born - a social and environmental movement for the protection and celebration of our natural environment, self-sufficiency, sustainability, community connectedness, and resiliency. This movement has now spread and today hundreds of cities and villages worldwide consider themselves a part of Transition.

This movement has created ample resources including literature, workshops, articles, films, and speakers, thus, creating a Transition Framework for various communities to function within (the framework includes adaptable, localized strategies that a wide range of contexts and people can use to build resilient communities, sustainable economic systems, and more empowered people). Places that have adapted the Transition Framework consider themselves “Transition Towns”. Transition Towns have emerged all over the globe in the last six years, including cities in Ireland, Australia, Chile, The Unites States, Portugal, Canada, Italy, England, and Germany. Guelph, Ontario, is one such town, and in 2008, "Transition Guelph" was officially launched.
**Context**

The Transition Movement reached Guelph in 2008 and runs deep in the city’s “veins” today. With over 200 members and participants who organize the annual Resilience Festival and put on countless events, it is evident that Transition Guelph (TG) is a valuable and celebrated organization in the Guelph community. Some of the events and campaigns that TG organizes include:

- Supporting and educating the public on the management of our own resources (energy, local food production, permaculture, seed and nut tree management) by offering a wide range of re-skilling workshops so that individuals can build their own capacities in conserving their resources
- TG organizes the annual Resiliency Festival in Guelph, where numerous speakers, workshops, and activities are offered to the public about sustainability, green energy, and conservation
- TG has a deep connection and respect to the land that colonial processes have allowed us to take, and has hosted many Aboriginal speakers, ceremonies, and story-telling events to remind us of our land's and peoples’ history

The Transition Model is built from a foundation of shared leadership which has shaped its organizational development into a highly consensual, cooperative, and equitable environment. Additionally, in the Guelph context, TG is community development in the making - it creates
local job opportunities through its alternative economic systems of a “Time Share” and bartering system, it offers opportunities for affordable housing, it provides social & communal activities like weekly potlucks, seminars, and skill-building workshops, and it promotes self-sustainability through urban farming and homesteading opportunities (Transition Guelph website, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Although there is much literature surrounding the origins of Transition, how to start a Transition Town, and news updates on current Transition communities, little research has been conducted in the personal, inter-personal, and phenomenological realms of Transition, and further, no literature has been published on individual experiences of Transition Guelph itself.

Purpose/Aims/Rationale

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how members of Transition, and Transition Guelph more specifically, experience this movement on a day-to-day basis. The rationale for completing this study is to address the phenomenological aspects of the Transition movement, as little research has been done on this topic prior to this study. My experience of the Transition movement and its community is the inspiration for this study; it triggered a curiosity in me to understand if others experience the transformational nature of
Transition as well. My hope is that the research conducted on TG and its members will allow me
to derive a better understanding of this phenomenon, its implications in Guelph, and how
members experience Transition and experience themselves through it.

I am also curious to understand the rationale behind members’ commitment to TG.
Transition Guelph has a deeply-rooted and loyal volunteer base - people that do not view this as
a volunteer position, but adapt their entire lifestyle to the framework and see it as their life’s
work. However, from my experience, the level of burnout in this organization is high, so why are
members still passionate and committed? What is it that sets this work apart from other causes,
initiatives, or movements?

**Research Goal**

My goal is to understand the phenomenology of membership in Transition Guelph. My research
question asks, *what is the experience of being a member of Transition Guelph?*

**Research Objectives**

The four key objectives of this study are:

1. To understand the participant’s motivation, how they came into the Transition movement,
   what their initial perceptions of the movement were, and what their initial experience was
   like.

2. To understand the participant’s current experience and how it has changed over time.
3. To understand how the participant views their future engagement.

4. To understand any transformations the participant has endured through their involvement with Transition.

**Review of Literature**

The review of literature for this study includes a very comprehensive and extensive overview of the Transition movement. It was relevant to do so for this study, as for the reader, it is important to gain a firm understanding of the movement itself to be able to make sense of the individual experiences that are explored in later chapters of this thesis. The literature review draws on existing documents from The Transition Network and its founders, including writer/teacher/activist, Rob Hopkins. The review of literature delves into the context of Transition and aims to gain a deeper cut of understanding the origins of Transition, why it emerged, how it came into fruition, what the nature of it is (its paradigm and principles), and how it translates to the wider domains of economy, environment, human health and well-being, and politics. Exploring the literature in an extensive way is necessary to i) explain the historical background of each topic; ii) discover if there are any existing explanations of the human experience of this movement; and iii) allow me to identify gaps in the literature to add to the findings of this study.
Methodology

The methodology of this study includes strategies and principles from heuristic research, phenomenological research, and narrative research.

Heuristic Research

This study stemmed from my own experience in the Transition movement, which sparked a curiosity about others’ experiences of transformation within this movement. Heuristic research encapsulates this exactly, as it is a type of research that begins with a personal question or experience, but can be applied to a wider context. The aim of heuristic research is discovery through self-inquiry, inner exploration, and dialogue (Moustakas, 1994). It is based on the premise that humans make meaning out of experiences, and to understand these meanings can lead to understanding human behaviours. The researcher first begins with searching within to understand and describe their own experiences in the topic (in my case, the Transition movement). The researcher writes his or her own story and then, with the contributions of the research participants, a blended description and understanding of the research is created.

Heuristic research focuses on the wholeness of an experience, and searches for the essence of an experience rather than an explanation. The data generated from heuristic research is valuable in understanding human behaviour and individual experiences, two components that make up a united relationship of subject and object (Moustakas, 1994).
I decided to use heuristic research because I desired finding a methodology that was meaningful to me, and one that could help me to navigate my own experiences with the Transition movement. Further, I wanted to investigate the human experience of Transition. As I am deeply rooted in this movement and I am on my own journey with the organization and community, I craved to understand others’ experiences of it too. I have completed my own story, and have answered the questions that I hope to ask the research participants. From analyzing my own story, I have identified emerging themes which will add to my understanding of the collective experience of Transition.

**Phenomenology and Narrative Research**

Phenomenology focuses on an individual’s subjective experience and interpretations of the world. Utilizing phenomenology in this study will help me to understand how the world appears to others, and to understand their lived experience of it. The purpose of a phenomenological study is to deepen the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon through extensive time spent with each participant of the study. Through embodiment of this, I was able to generate value-laden, socially constructed data of participants’ experiences of the Transition movement, and more specifically, Transition Guelph. Through following this approach, I gained rich data from the experiences of individuals.

Phenomenology can also encompass narrative research. My research surrounds the life experience of humans, and through the use of narrative research, I was able to re-tell and share
each story that the participants shared with me through their oral history interviews. Thus, the research will be exploratory and descriptive in nature with each narrative that is collected.

As a researcher, I see the world through the lens of social and environmental justice, collaboration, resiliency, and hope (which explains why I chose this topic of study). It is important to note that this research is emergent and exploratory - I have no preconceived theories entering this study - I simply want to deepen my understanding of the lived human experience of Transition.

**Plan of Inquiry**

**In-Depth Interviews/Stories**

Story telling as a data acquisition method is a useful tool in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews that ask the story of each participant inspires freedom of expression, it fosters creativity, and it levels out power imbalances as the participant gets to dictate the direction of the dialogue. For the purpose of my research, and its nature as being phenomenological and exploratory, in-depth interviews that draw out stories from participants is most appropriate.

To achieve my research objectives, I decided to use in-depth interviews and stories as the form of data collection. I conducted seven in-depth interviews, and during the interviews, an
interview guide was followed in which introductions were made, a review of the study was shared, and consent to participate in the study and to be audio recorded was given. Following these formalities, a series of seventeen questions were asked, which were derived from my own experience and from gaps that existed in the literature. The results of these interviews gifted me each individual’s journey that is co-crafted (by the researcher and participant) into a story to be published in a separate chapter of this thesis. Co-creation of the data was embodied through a data verification process of inviting each participant to read and edit their story to ensure that it captures their experience to their liking. These stories provided a wealth of data to perform analysis and determine my research findings.

**Data Analysis**

I transcribed the interviews verbatim into electronic format to ensure that I captured the nuances and meanings behind each sigh, silence, and word stumble. It was important to do so, as it captured each participant’s struggle and contemplation with putting their story to words. To make sense of the data, I composed a story about each participant’s journey with the Transition movement. I used direct quotes whenever possible to ensure accuracy and richness of their experience, and sent the story to each participant for feedback.

I decided to analyze the data manually, as I am not comfortable with data analysis software, nor do I appreciate how it mechanizes an organic process. From each story, twenty to thirty-five themes emerged capturing the various triumphs, learnings, issues, and challenges with
involvement in the Transition movement. Each theme was written on a separate note, colour-coordinated to the participant, and stuck to the wall. Through categorizing and clustering the data, eight main themes emerged, and I arranged and re-arranged them into groupings with sub-headings. It was in this process of manual, colour-coded data analysis from which my findings emerged.

**Limitations**

The data gained from this study is qualitative, exploratory and phenomenological, and generalizations to other Transition initiatives should be cautioned. When recruiting research participants, it was not possible to obtain a random sample of the Transition Guelph population that could accurately represent each socioeconomic status, culture, sex and gender. Through the criteria developed for participants involved in this study, I have chosen to invite seven specific individuals who are deeply embedded in Transition Guelph, and although they will provide rich stories, their demographics will lack diversity. My research will provide insight on the experiences of being part of Transition Guelph, but because no other data exists to compare it to, my research will only provide a baseline study.
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The world is rapidly changing. Technological advancements, globalization, the Internet, and the availability of cheap oil have accelerated humanity far past where we were one hundred years ago (Hopkins, 2011), but at what expense? It is important to understand how we were able to craft the standard of living we currently enjoy in the West, and explore the implications of this lifestyle.

In our contemporary Western world, we experience minimal connectedness to our food source (Hopkins, 2008). Seasons are a mere pattern; rather than adapting to them, we alter them any way we can. We escape to warmer climates in the winter, consume oranges in December, and have no concept of living in harmony with the seasons. Our food choices are not crafted by seasonality, but by the power of food corporations who offer fresh produce year-round (Patel, 2007). Many households rely on instant, processed foods for convenience. A high level of dependency on external inputs, such as oil, is evident. Food economies function on a massive, industrial scale, where consumers are rarely connected to producers (Patel, 2007). Production has shifted to larger operations, which becomes increasingly complex and requires a high level of capital investment and management skill (Agriculture and Agrifood Canada, 2008). The price of food and manufactured goods are not an accurate representation of all costs and inputs that go
into creating them. The basis for production is cheap labour and out-sourcing, while catalyzing social justice violations, social inequality, and poverty.

Our dependancy on cheap oil is directly linked to how vulnerable we are to economic and environmental shocks, and when disasters do occur, our resiliency and ability to “bounce back” is crippled (Chamberlin, 2009). Our carbon emissions are sky-rocketing and we are accelerating global warming, damaging many fragile ecosystems and vulnerable people (Hopkins, 2011). Additionally, we have lost a sense of community and, to replace it, have developed a sense of false belonging with our vast virtual connectedness to each other. The opportunities to be a part of a community are lessoning, as suburbs and the need for independence increase (Patel, 2007). Essentially, we have lost touch with our environment and the food it produces and in that, lost touch with each other.

The Transition Movement is a response to this rapidly changing world and it addresses our need to re-build resilient and connected communities in the face of climate change and peak oil. Transition initiatives make designing a new world accessible, feasible, and desirable (Chamberlin, 2009). This paper explores Transition, how it addresses the concerns of our current social, economic, and environmental state, and how it can be used as a tool to turn problems into solutions through collective action, building resiliency, and community engagement.

This paper will be divided into several main components. First I define the context by outlining the current state of our natural world, through an environmental lens. Next, I explore
the need for Transition - how and why it came into fruition and how it is used to re-write the story of our civilization. Then I describe the theories, paradigms, and principles of the Transition Movement, while later delving into the main philosophies and ideas behind Transition. The following sections explore how Transition addresses the social, environmental, political, economic, and human health implications of our industrial world. Following this, I discuss the various literature, educational opportunities, and media releases that have sprouted from the Transition Movement. To conclude, I offer a critical reflection of the literature from a research perspective.

**Context: The State of Our Environment**

**Climate Change**

To understand climate change and the global warming of the earth, it is important to understand that we need The Greenhouse Effect (GHE) in order to sustain life on this planet - GHE is not something that we invented. The Greenhouse Effect is a process of water vapour and carbon trapping the sun’s energy in our atmosphere and stopping it from being bounced back into space (Hopkins, 2011).

However, humans have accelerated this natural process through the high levels of carbon that we are releasing into the atmosphere, causing our world to warm faster than it would naturally. This 0.6 degrees Celsius increase in world temperature has many devastating effects, such as more rainfall, flooding, melting of ice caps, and more severe storms. The Director of the
National Snow and Ice Data Centre declared that, “All indications are that sea ice will continue
to decline … we are looking at a seasonally ice-free arctic in 20-30 years” (University of
Colorado Publication, 2010). Additionally, as the world warms up, so does the soil, resulting in
the soil releasing carbon at much higher and quicker rates than before (Chamberlin, 2009).

Climate change is showing its effects worldwide, but it is currently affecting the
developing world more drastically than the West which, ironically, is the largest contributor to
climate change (Hopkins, 2008). Less developed countries do not have the same infrastructure,
financial support, cohesive governments, resources, or social cohesion to find rapid responses to
the consequence of global warming, and therefore, it deepens levels of poverty, inequality, and
hunger. One study conducted by Meinshausen, et al. (2009) indicated that world emissions will
have peaked by 2020, and that, in order to potentially avoid climate change, we will have to
reduce our emissions by 86-92% before 2050 (Meinshausen, et al, 2009). This seems nearly
impossible to do, unless we rapidly and radically restructure society. How we live our lives now
will determine the future of our planet (Chamberlin, 2009).

Peak Oil

The western world, and increasingly other developing nations as well, are dependant on
oil. Tony Blair once noted that the “lifeblood” of Western economies is oil (Homer-Dixon, 2007),
but oil is a finite resource and one that we are depleting fast. The term peak oil refers to the point
of maximum oil flow in a region, with a decline of availability following shortly after, and this
term also refers to the global peak of oil availability. Peak oil is also used to describe energy resource depletion and the challenges associated with this (Chamberlin, 2009).

There is no question that the access to oil has led us to places and shaped developments that would have been inconceivable without it. As Hopkins states in *The Transition Handbook*, “Oil has allowed us to create extraordinary technologies, cultures, and discoveries, to set foot on the moon and perfect the pop tart” (Hopkins, 2008:20). Yet we have used it and continue to use it beyond our means. Oil consumption and lavish western lifestyles have caused us to deplete a delicate natural resource, while contributing to global warming and climate change.

Cheap oil is not environmentally sustainable, and the Transition movement is underpinned with the understanding that, for a society so dependant on cheap oil, an enormous shift needs to occur (Hopkins, 2008). Transition aims to understand climate change, global warming, peak oil, and our cultural addiction to oil as a multi-faceted problem, so that we can formulate holistic solutions to this seemingly unsolvable issue.

**Why Transition?**

**Origins of the Transition Movement**

Rob Hopkins, a permaculture teacher at The University of Kinsale in Ireland, decided it would be an excellent learning opportunity for his students to engage in a hands-on, community-based exercise. In 2006, he had his students design an action plan for a carbon-free, completely
sustainable Kinsale entitled, *The Energy Descent Action Plan* (EDAP). This small exercise turned into a course, and soon the entire community of Kinsale was involved in taking this report and developing it into on-the-ground initiatives. Some of the projects in this report included a bike share program, hydroponic systems in the downtown centre, new waste-management strategies, and localization initiatives (for investment in local business and promoting local food projects). The town council even took to the EDAP and incorporated it into city policies (Hopkins, 2011).

Hopkins moved to Totnes, Devon in the UK shortly after Kinsale’s *Energy Decent Action Plan* was complete, and the local Totnes community was taken with the strategy as well - it offered hope, collaboration, creativity, fun, and an opportunity for people of all ages, cultures, and incomes brackets to be involved and empowered. It was the community of Totnes that branded the name *Transition*, and in 2006 they officially launched “Transition Town Totnes”, the first official Transition town that was carbon-neutral (Chamberlin, 2009). Hopkins and a team from Totnes began touring and giving lectures about Transition and how to build resilient and sustainable communities from the ground up all over the UK.

Although Transition was initially framed as a response to peak oil and climate change, the idea has taken root in many different places. When Steph Bradley from the Transition Network traveled around the UK, curious to know why people joined Transition, she found that less and less did citizens want to dwell on the negative effects of climate change and degradation of the environment, but rather, they wanted to share their stories and their excitement about
Transition. For them, they had found purpose, community, and inspiration (Hopkins, 2011). The initiative snow-balled into an international movement, and by 2010 there were hundreds of Transition Towns emerging worldwide. Currently, there are thousands, and even more “unofficial” Transition initiatives globally (The Transition Network, 2014).

The Importance of Stories

Stories shape the way we think and feel about our reality, but the problem with stories is when they shape our thinking in ways that do not reflect our reality, and yet, we refuse to change them (Chamberlin, 2009). Our current cultural narrative in the West has us behaving as though our resources are infinite. We are trapped in this story, but we have allowed it to shape our actions, causing negative implications in our social and natural environments (Chamberlin, 2009). Our stories are just a reflection of our understanding of the world, which is seen in our levels of oil consumption. What story will we tell ourselves once the oil has been depleted? As Chamberlin eloquently states in his book, The Transition Timeline, “Our stories of the future are not just scenarios - they are interactive, just as we are. They must change in response to the world around them just as they themselves shape its future” (Chamberlin, 2009:39).

The work of Transition addresses the need for us to re-write our stories and cultural narrative, as it is a direct and proactive response to our current world reality (Hopkins, 2011). Transition puts the power back in the hands of the people, and allows them to shape their stories, and therefore their experiences, in a way that is meaningful to them. The Transition vision is one where we stop and reflect honestly on the implications that our current ways of being create, and
then address those impacts head-on through local, community-based initiatives that move us into a resilient, satisfying future (Chamberlin, 2009). When a Transition initiative takes place in a town, it can change the whole way that people perceive that town, it changes the discourse of the town (how it is talked about), and it can change the story of that town.

**Hope Theories and Engaged Optimism**

A central theme to Transition is hope. The notion of ‘engaged optimism’ is, essentially, believing in the power of hope and coupling it with action (Hopkins, 2011). In a world that functions off of two main discourses (the first one, originating from the media and politicians in the West, declares that we can have as much as we want whenever we want it and the second one, derived from an environmental perspective, evokes fear about the state of the environment), it is easy to feel powerless and hopeless in the face of such strong cultural stories. In the Transition context, hope, “…a socially mediated human capacity with various dimensions (affective, cognitive, and behavioural)” (Webb, 2012:398) is an integral way of gaining momentum and action. In Dauenhauer’s terms, and how it has been adopted by Transition, hope is, “[A]n exercise in ‘guiding and goading’ with the aim of making possible the renewal of one’s community” (Dauenhauer, 1986:194). Transition calls us to transform our ‘inner attitude’ of the world, in order to change our outer experience of it.

**A Cultural Shift**

Transition initially started off as an environmental movement, but has transformed into a cultural shift (Hopkins, 2011). As it is an actions-based initiative, it calls us to re-evaluate our
every day actions in a carbon-rich world, and work toward changing them in whatever way we see fit for our individual context. It involves asking what the culture of our communities would need to be like in order to be as resilient as possible in the face of great environmental, economic, and social changes.

It has been shown in studies that people are willing to stay committed to a cause if they act on intrinsic values, rather than extrinsic ones (Hopkins, 2011). Values lie on a spectrum, and generally, intrinsic values are the ones that are based on a sense of well-being, community, self-worth and family, while extrinsic values reflect a comparison to others and envy related to money, power, or wealth (Crompton and Kasser, 2010). Transition is effective because it cultivates intrinsic values such as community, a sense of belonging, and working toward positive change.

The Transition Momentum and “The Theory of Anyway”

As stated in The Transition Companion, the Transition Movement is gaining momentum (Hopkins, 2011). It is about changing the place where you live into a resilient, vibrant, and localized community, making it more entrepreneurial and connected. This is an idea that is quickly catching on, which is why we have seen thousands of Transition initiatives emerging all over the world within the last six years. People have become involved because it builds hope while giving them something to work toward, and allowing them to build the future they have
always dreamed of in the face of peak oil and climate change (Hopkins, 2011). Blogger Sharon Astyk believes that most people participate in Transition initiatives because they would be doing it anyway, coining this term, “The Theory of Anyway”. Many individuals who are involved in this movement already eat locally and seasonally, live simply, and connect to their local economies. Transition puts a formal name to these actions and provides enhanced learning opportunities to deepen these passions and skills (Astyk, 2007).

**Theories, Paradigms, and Principles of Transition**

**Recognitions Underpinning the Transition Response**

Part of the Transition perspective is being honest about the state of our world - not to produce fear, but to enable us to move forward in appropriate ways in our own context. Taken directly from Hopkins’s book *The Transition Companion: Making your community more resilient in uncertain times* (2011), there are six main premises underpinning the Transition movement. These include: “(1) Climate change and peak oil require urgent action; (2) Life with less energy is inevitable; it is better to plan for it than to be taken by surprise; (3) Industrial society has lost the resilience to be able to cope with energy shocks; (4) We have to act together, now; (5) Infinite growth within a finite system is impossible; and (6) If we plan and act early enough, and use our creativity and cooperation to unloose the genius within our local communities, we can build a future far more fulfilling and enriching, more connected to, and more gentle on the earth, than the life we have today” (Hopkins, 2011:39).
In his work on the *Future Scenarios* (2009), David Holmgren discusses the range of outcomes that our society will endure in the face of these mass environmental changes. His three scenarios include Adaptation, Collapse, and Evolution, all of which are plausible outcomes (Holmgren, 2009). The world could focus on adaptation in the face of climate change, where we try to ‘invent’ our way out of danger (which in some ways, we already have with using unconventional oil to supplement our decrease in availability of conventional oil). Or, another plausible scenario is that of collapse, where we assume that the outcome of climate change will mean the gradual collapse of society as we know it. On the other hand, there is the evolution perspective, which would require a large degree of collective action, and a change in our values and how we perceive the world. With the evolution perspective, we evolve out of our current ways of knowing and interacting with the environment and with each other, and into a more community-based, localized, and low-carbon way (Holmgren, 2009). Holmgren’s Evolution Scenario is the approach that Transition embodies.

**Resilience and Resiliency Thinking**

What is resiliency, in the context of Transition? Resilience is the main theme underlying the Transition movement. In a report about resiliency in ‘Resilient Nation’, Charlie Edwards defines it as, “The capacity of an individual, community, or system to adapt in order to sustain an acceptable level of function, structure, and identity” (Edwards, 2009). Transition takes this definition one step further and calls us to re-think our assumptions about the current systems, and discover how new infrastructure could lead us to a more fulfilling and enriching low-carbon
economy and community. If we deny that the world is changing, we limit our options, increase our vulnerability, and forego emerging opportunities (Walker and Salt, 2006).

Transition looks at building resiliency on all levels. It means building diversity in landscapes (through permaculture), people (through supporting multiculturalism and people of all ages and genders), businesses (supporting the diversity of social enterprises and businesses who contribute to the greater good), and economic models (supporting alternative economic models like bartering systems, time shares, and local currencies) (Hopkins, 2013). For Transition, resilience also means social capital, where communities respond to challenges together through demonstrating trust, leadership, and vibrancy. Resiliency also takes on the form of innovation, where Transition encourages learning, exploration and adaptation, and creating a space for valuing experimentation (Hopkins, 2013). In Transition, resiliency takes into account the impacts of community activities on the local ecosystem, dealing directly with the implications, rather than taking an “out of sight, out of mind” approach as much of the western world does (Hopkins, 2011). As stated in The Transition Companion, “If we view resiliency as an opportunity for an economic and social renaissance, this new culture of enterprise and re-skilling should lead to a happier and healthier community while reducing its vulnerability to risk and uncertainty” (Hopkins, 2011:46).

**Systems Thinking**

Systems thinking, a concept also practiced in the field of capacity development and extension, is a key concept to the Transition movement and building both resilient communities
and economies. Systems Thinking encapsulates the many interconnected and changing aspects of capacity development and it is encouraging of seeing the ‘whole’ rather than fixating on individual parts (Morgan, 2005). It is instrumental in understanding the process of how parts work together and affect each other to make the larger system function. With Systems Thinking, it is best to have a holistic understanding of the issue first, and then delve into the specifics, rather than vice versa. The outcome of the process can be better understood by examining the interrelationships between the actors and this way of thinking can play a vital role in evaluating and reflecting on the outcomes of any development project (Morgan, 2005).

Transition takes Systems Thinking and places it in the context of making systems resilient to shock. In The Transition Timeline for a Local, Resilient Future (2009), Chamberlin discusses three main components of ensuring that a system is resilient to shock. These include: modularity, diversity, and tightness of feedbacks (Chamberlin, 2009). Modularity refers to the extent to which certain parts of the systems are independent of others, and how well they could function if the entire system crashed. Diversity, as mentioned above, needs to occur between each module; it will adapt to its local conditions, perform effectively, supporting the system as a whole. The tightness of feedbacks refers to how quickly the system can respond to changes in the environment (Chamberlin, 2009).

The Transition Approach and Vision

The Transition Paradigm indicates a move toward something, rather than a pull away from something. In this context, it is a move toward clean air, connected communities and
celebration (Hopkins, 2011). This paradigm shapes the Transition approach, which means “… nurturing locally owned businesses which use local resources sustainably, employ local workers at decent wages, and serve primarily local consumers. It means becoming more self-sufficient and … control moves from the board rooms back to the community where it belongs” (Shuman, 2000).

Transition is an organic process, with many different initiatives unfolding worldwide. It comes from the community that it starts in, and will change depending on the context, place, and people involved. It is a grassroots process that is not linear or prescriptive in nature, and each Transition initiative is different than the next. Although a general “Transition Toolkit” has been established, the tools can be utilized in a variety of different contexts, and are used very differently in each scenario (Hopkins, 2011). There is no one right way of doing things, which is why the creativity and uniqueness of the community who designs their own Transition initiative specific to their place is so important.

**Principles of Transition**

There are seven principles that make up the building blocks of Transition, and these principles guide the every day activities, initiatives, and decision-making process of this movement. The principles were a process and evolution in themselves, having been created organically - they were already in practice unknowingly until the first Transition curriculum was created, in which they were collectively discussed and formally documented by a team from the Transition Network (Hopkins, 2011).
As paraphrased from *The Transition Companion* (2011), the principles are as follows: (1) Positive Visioning: The community-led creation of a new vision and re-writing their story to help the community reduce its dependancy on oil; (2) Access to Reliable Information/Knowledge Dissemination: Transition raises awareness of peak oil and climate change, and it is imperative that the latest, most accurate information is made accessible, simple, articulate to all; (3) Inclusiveness and Openness: This is based on the need to involve local players at all levels in decision-making processes (community members, businesses, community groups, and local authorities) to ensure that no “us and them” thinking occurs; (4) Enable Sharing & Networking: Transition openly shares its successes failures, to build transparency and the collective experience; (5) Building Resilience; (6) Inner and Outer Transition: Transition aims to support people in the inner and outer processes that they may experience in response to peak oil, job losses, or environmental degradation; (7) Subsidiary: Transition does not centralize or control decision-making processes, but allow for everyone to be involved at the most appropriate, practical and effective level (Hopkins, 2011).

**Philosophy and Ideas Behind Transition**

There are many philosophies that have inspired and grounded the work of Transition. Some of these include Carlo DiClemente’s work on the study of addiction; Joanna Macy’s work on “Despair and Empowerment”; the science of happiness; capacity development and extension frameworks; and “The Leaderless Organization”.

Philosophical Underpinnings of Transition

Psychologist Carlo DiClemente practices in the study of addictions, and much of his work has inspired the Transition movement in ways of understanding our addiction to oil. DiClemente has created the ‘Stages of Change’ model (2003) to understand habits of addiction, and behavioural changes that take place through overcoming addictions. The idea behind the Stages of Change model is that change does not happen all in one step, but rather, each person must decide for themselves when it is time to move on to the next stage. Stages include Pre-contemplation (not yet acknowledging that there is an issue); Contemplation (acknowledgement, but not committed to making the change); Preparation (getting ready to change); Action (changing behaviour); Maintenance (maintaining the behaviour change); and Relapse (abandoning the new changes and returning to old habits) (DiClemente, 2003). This is a very different approach to understanding how people will change their behaviours toward the environment than the typical environmentalist approach of using alarming facts to generate fear.

Joanna Macy is an activist, eco-scholar and a teacher who has studied in the areas of ecopsychology and spirituality. Her work in ‘Despair and Empowerment’ (now referred to as ‘The Work That Reconnects’) emerged as a response to the inner struggles that individuals endure when faced with the plight of the earth and the destructive path that we are on (NurrieSterns, 2014). Her work informed and inspired ‘Inner Transition’, a branch of Transition initiatives that look inward as a means of transformative change. This concept will be discussed further in later parts of this thesis.
The Science of Happiness is a course exploring the roots of a happy and meaningful life, and many of the findings of this course have been incorporated into Transition Initiatives, such as re-building connectedness to your neighbours, and planting/caring for a garden. This course was created by Berkley’s Greater Good Science Centre and focuses on a central finding in positive psychology: “That happiness is inextricably linked to having strong social ties and contributing to something bigger than yourself - the greater good” (Greater Good Science Centre, 2014).

The field and practice of Capacity Development and Extension promotes many characteristics that the Transition movement incorporates. Some of these characteristics include: viewing an issue in a holistic way (as multi-faceted and involving as many stakeholders as possible); valuing the process of development, rather than being outcome oriented; building relationships and placing emphasis on the inter-connectedness and collaboration within communities; among others. The Capacity Development Results Framework is a practical framework that addresses a need for development projects to be sustainable and work from the ground up, rather than have donors dictating the process. In CDRF, donors are encouraged to act as facilitators and supporters in development programs (Otoo, et al., 2009). This framework proposes alternative methods to monitor and evaluate development projects. It encourages capacity development practitioners and stakeholders to think through objectives of a development program and monitor the change process (Otoo, et al., 2009). It provides a framework for implementing capacity development programs, analyzing the limitations and/or possibilities for the development project to meet their goals, and it offers a means to quantify and communicate the outcome of the development project. This framework aims to bring about
change at the operational level, viewing stakeholders as “agents of change” (Otoo, et al., 2009:3). Aspects of the CDRF Framework, along with characteristics from the field of capacity development, have shaped the nature of the Transition movement, and how it evaluates its successes and failures.

Additionally, work from Bradman and Beckstrom’s *The Starfish and the Spider: the unstoppable power of leaderless organizations* (2006) suggests that self-organized organizations are more dynamic and effective than structured ones. This book refers to the biological nature of a starfish as having a decentralized neural structure that allows it to regenerate when necessary (Bradman and Beckstrom, 2006). Transition is one such leaderless organization, and this flexibility is essential in its work with resilience and ability to ‘bounce back’ and regenerate when necessary, like a starfish.

Carlo DiClemente’s work on the study of addiction; Joanna Macy’s work on “Despair and Empowerment”; the science of happiness; capacity development and extension frameworks; and “The Leaderless Organization” are all ideas that have shaped my understanding of this movement in a theoretical sense. Later sections of this thesis will explore how Transition is lived and experienced by its members on a day-to-day basis.
Ideas Behind Transition: Collaboration, Collective Leadership, and Self-Organization

“It’s like whoa, when we get together, it’s like everyone is feeding everyone else. There’s this atmosphere of ‘I tell you … you tell me’. Everyone listens, then someone comes up with another idea. It’s like collective excitement, collective inspiration, collective knowledge, coming together for the profit of the group. You can feel the thrill” (Emiliano Munoz, Portillo en Transicion, as stated in the opening page of The Power of Just Doing Stuff; Hopkins, 2013).

There are many ideas behind the Transition movement, but the three core characteristics include: collaboration, collective leadership, and self-organization. Transition is built off of the idea of collaboration on all levels: collaboration of individuals to implement on-the-ground projects like community gardens; collaboration of local businesses to support and promote one another; collaboration at the political level of governments coming together to build Food Strategies and Clean Energy Strategies; and so on. The idea is to foster the growth of cross-sector policy networks to address public problems. In their article on collaboration from the perspective of social change organizations, Ospina and Foldy (2010) state that, “good leadership demands collaboration” (Ospina and Foldy, 2010:293).

In a study conducted by Christina Samuels on school principals engaging in collective leadership (2010), she found that high student achievement was linked to collective leadership
(with participation from staff, parents, and outside educators) instilled by the principal of the school. Principals that used collective leadership also offered access to expertise and provided follow-up actions to support staff (Samuels, 2010). There was an emphasis on building capacity in others, sharing responsibilities, being in dialogue, building relationships, and placing value on the process. The Transition movement uses collective leadership techniques to ensure a more vibrant, dynamic, holistic, and equitable working environment.

Given the nature of Transition initiatives as leaderless, collaborative and grassroots, one of the essential aspects of this movement is the ability to self-organize and self-mobilize. As seen time and time again through the multitude of Transition initiatives worldwide, local action catalyzes change, and when people are truly engaged in an initiative, they will self-organize. In 2010, over ninety Transition initiatives were set up in Sweden alone (Hopkins, 2011). A strong example of self-organization in practice was in 2011, when an e-mail was sent to The Transition Network from a Transition group in France exclaiming that, “There’s a real frenzy about Transition right now … the public and media interest is growing fast … we have two national meetings, and many conferences are to take place this month” (Hopkins, 2011:25).

As mentioned previously, Transition takes a holistic approach to building resiliency at the local level. The following sections will explore this notion further, and journey through the spheres of social, emotional, political, economic, and human health to answer the question what is Transition and how is it embodied in each of these contexts?
What is Transition: Social Implications

Transition as a Tool for Shifting Problems to Solutions

While it might feel overwhelming to honestly look at the current state of our world, Transition tries to view issues of peak oil and climate change as opportunities, thereby turning problems into solutions. “The ability to transmute these issues is a key aspect of Transition” (Hopkins, 2011:74). Because of the nature of Transition as a grass-roots and community led initiative, it can take on many forms and has the ability to get things done according to the community’s timeline. For instance, Transition initiatives in Guelph, Ontario have addressed the concern of not all citizens having affordable access to holistic healthcare or skill-building opportunities. Thus, the Transition Guelph Timebank was created which enables citizens to trade time (one hour is worth one hour) (Transition Guelph Website, 2014). What we see now is local acupuncturists and naturopathic doctors giving hour-long sessions, gaining “hour dollars” which they can then use however they wish (to perhaps partake in a backyard chicken workshop or a give to a local cleaner to help tidy their office space). This promotes the sharing of skills, the accessibility of services, and the time investment into local initiatives and businesses.

In addition to sharing skills and services and strengthening community, many Transition initiatives are fun, easy and create a buzz. Overtime, nine main characteristics emerged that are threaded through each Transition initiative. The Transition Companion (2011) indicates that the initiatives are joyful; viral; open-source (the ideas emerge collectively from Open Space
facilitation techniques and an open-source collaboration style); they are self-organizing; the initiatives are hopeful and constructive; iterative (learning from their successes and their failures); context-based and sensitive to place and scale; clarifying rather than create more confusion by offering clear explanations of the issue with lots of room for questions; and the initiatives are historic by acting as a historic opportunity to re-write our story (Hopkins, 2011).

As previously mentioned, the Transition process is one that is ever changing - it is not prescriptive, outcome-based or top-down. There have been courses and conferences designed around Transition. As a way to mobilize the knowledge of the Transition movement and to entice other communities around the world to set up their own Transition initiatives, “The 12 Steps to Transition” have been created (Hopkins, 2011). These steps are merely guidelines that a community can choose (or not choose) to use in guiding their Transition process, and the steps do not need to be followed in any particular order. For instance, how Transition Guelph emerged was vastly different than the Transition movement in Kitchener, Ontario (a city just thirty kilometres away).

Borrowed again, from The Transition Companion (2011) and originally developed in Transition Town Totnes, the 12 Steps of Transition include: (1) Set up a steering committee and design its demise from the outset; (2) awareness raising; (3) lay the foundations; (4) organize a great unleashing - the term unleashing refers to the launching event of a Transition initiative that celebrates its arrival while creating hope and momentum in the community; (5) form working groups - for example, in Transition Guelph working groups include Community Engagement,
Inner Transition, Local Economy, Re-skilling, The Narratives Project, Urban Food, Fair Trade City, The Buildings Group, and Transition Healthcare Resilience (Transition Guelph Website, 2014); (6) use Open-Space as a means of facilitation, idea creation and decision-making; (7) develop visible and practical manifestations of each project; (8) facilitate the great re-skilling; (9) build a bridge to the local government; (10) honour the elders; (11) let it go where it wants to go; and (12) create an energy descent plan for the community (Hopkins, 2011:79).

EDAP and “Edaptation”

The very seed of Transition was created by the permaculture class in Kinsale, Ireland in 2006 through their completion of the Energy Descent Action Plan (EDAP) Kinsale. It was created as a tangible way for communities to easily build resilience to peak oil, while increasing their connectedness to each other and building economic vibrancy (Chamberlin, 2009). An EDAP can come in many forms, from written reports, to doodled timelines, to diagrams, pictures and images of what the community’s vision of a resilient future looks like. Overall, it is a strategy to reduce dependency on oil - it is a new approach with a set of tools that are constantly evolving (Chamberlin, 2009). It usually starts with a community visioning exercise, with these visions being recorded and printed in a variety of ways (as mentioned above). It instills hope, proactivity and excitement in those involved, and each person takes on responsibilities that they feel called to do.
Out of the Energy Descent Action Plan of the Sunshine Coast’s Transition initiative in British Columbia, emerged the term adaptation - the act of a community adapting to climate change through the creation of an EDAP; the act of transitioning into a post-carbon future; the far-reaching modification of attitudes, values, and behaviours; and the act of a personal change in perception and behaviour (Chamberlin, 2009).

**What is Transition: Emotional and Psychological Implications**

Our world is very advanced in many ways, yet consuming more resources, producing pollution and debt, and climbing the success ladder do not necessarily make us happy people. In fact, many would argue that our life has created much gloom, where we are disconnected from each other, and in turn, disconnected from ourselves (Patel, 2007). Climate change, economic crises and loss of jobs can all have inner effects on us. “Yet, the potential for connectedness is always present in human beings. When fostered, it can promote reciprocal relations and commitments in groups and organizations that, in turn, generate the collaboration required to achieve collective goals” (Chamberlin, 2009:292).

**Inner Transition**

Many people and professionals working in the field of climate change have formed an ability to compartmentalize different aspects of life and discoveries in their field. As a society, we are taught about environmental degradation or economic crises perhaps in a class at school, but these are issues that may have deep effects on some people and need to be addressed in a
holistic way. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’s “5 Stages of Grief” suggest that people pass through stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance when they encounter grief (Kübler-Ross, 2005). Transition initiatives demonstrate, on the whole, that they have reached passed the depression stage and have arrived at acceptance, showing what is possible (Hopkins, 2011).

A branch of Transition has been formed, named Inner Transition, and it takes a holistic approach to understanding the implications of peak oil and climate change, thereby not separating the outer workings of the world from the inner workings in ourselves. Some have taken on the name “Heart and Soul Groups”. Inner Transition can occur in any community and supports the wider processes happening within individuals through offering support groups, counselling sessions, conflict mediation, and creating a space to safely explore the upset that climate change can create in us (Hopkins, 2011). In these groups, people are able to fully express themselves creatively and find support.

The basics to motivation, functioning, and well-being of all humans, argues psychologist Tim Kasser, are (1) safety and security; (2) competence and self-esteem; (3) connectedness; and (4) autonomy and authenticity (Kasser, 2002). Transition, and Inner Transition more specifically, work toward achieving these four needs in all ways possible (Hopkins, 2011).
What is Transition: Political Implications

“What would it look like if the best responses to peak oil and climate change came not from committees and Acts of Parliament, but from you and me and the people around us?” (Hopkins, 2011:12).

Transition in the Political Sphere

Transition initiatives are appealing in many ways as they are low-cost, easy to implement, community-driven, and merely the right thing to do (Astyk, 2007). Transition takes a unique approach to politics, through leading by example and allowing the buzz of it all to reach politicians, rather than acting out of anger through protesting. In 2009, the UK’s Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change Ed Miliband requested to be part of the 2009 Transition Network Conference in the UK. The Transition Network invited him to be a “keynote listener” so that he could hear it from the people themselves, and bring back the information to Parliament. Since then, Miliband has given many speeches about Transition through his work as the Labour Leader (Hopkins, 2011).

Part of the Transition Vision is to work more closely with local, national, and international governments to implement policies on climate change. What might this look like? On an global level, it could mean strong international climate change protocols, biodiversity protection plans, and realistically high prices for oil. On a domestic level, it may look like energy quotas, a national food strategy, or supporting the delocalization of industry; and on the local
level, it could mean promoting Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), credit unions, Energy Descent Action Plans, and land trusts (Hopkins, 2011).

**Transition Initiatives in Less Developed Countries**

It has not yet been discussed how Transition can be effective in Less Developed Countries (LDCs). Development projects have historically been donor-led, carried out with ulterior motives and work in the favour of whoever holds and carries the most power (Bolger, 2000). Much like traditional extension, many development efforts are ethnocentric, laden with inaccessible jargon, top-down and patriarchal. Globally, numerous development projects have failed due to their lack of building long-term, sustainable capacities with communities, and to their inability to empower local people. To address the shortcomings of these sorts of development programs, the study and practice of capacity development has emerged, and with it, a new way of fostering lasting positive change. Capacity development can be referred to strategy for mitigating poverty and empowering marginalized populations, or it can be spoken of as a development goal (Bolger, 2000).

Transition is unlike these traditional development projects because it is for the citizens, formed by the citizens. Transition initiatives, like capacity development, are meant for the people who shape them, and it has proven to bring people together, build local and resilient economic systems, build capacities within people with its skill-building strategies, thereby empowering local citizens (Chamberlin, 2009). Transition initiatives exist in Brazil, China, Chile and eastern European nations today (Hopkins, 2011). In Brazil, the Transition movement proved to be an
excellent example of how these initiatives can bridge wealth gaps and connect people - they saw Shamen, rappers, wealthy people, community elders, and local residents all come together to create the Transition movement locally, based on the needs of their context (Hopkins, 2011).

**What is Transition: Economic Implications**

“Conventional economic growth and cheap oil have marched hand in hand for the best part of 60 years; within just a few years, it will have become increasingly apparent that both are on their last legs” (Porritt, 2005:84).

**2008 Economic Crisis and Transition as an Economic Approach**

The 2008 economic crisis experienced in the West came as a shock to all. Part of the reason for this economic crisis was the risks that bankers were taking with our money. Society felt the hits hardest due to our high reliance on oil, our high levels of debt, and our dependance on economic systems to be stable. Many people lost their jobs and houses, oil prices sky-rocketed, and it left in its wake a society of devastated and disempowered citizens.

In response to the economic crisis of 2008, Transition initiatives aimed to create a post-growth economy, from the bottom up. As government budgets and funding were cut, and donors became more stretched, Transition initiatives needed to support themselves. A new culture of entrepreneurship and localization was born (Chamberlin, 2008). In Totnes, Devon in 2009, it was decided that certain criteria would make up their economic approach to building a resilient
community. Some of these criteria include: an emphasis on local; resilience thinking (buildings and programs will be built out of the idea of resilience, so that a community can maximize their ability to endure times of uncertainty); bringing assets into community ownership; be low-carbon in all that they do; recognize the natural limits of the earth; and increase the number of business models such as social enterprises, co-ops, and increased levels of corporate social responsibility for large corporations (Hopkins, 2011).

**Localization**

Transition supports alternative economic systems, primarily through the notion of localization. Localization is “[A]bout finding a more secure and sustainable balance between trade and local production” (Norberg-Hodge, 2002:24), while investing in local businesses and celebrating local skill-sets and people. Taken from *The Transition Companion* (2011), localization can mean a variety of different things, including: meeting local needs through local production (in food, energy, and construction); trading in a low carbon manner and offering more economic security; businesses and economic processes are designed with social justice and collaboration in mind; farming and food production will gain greater appreciation; and localized communities will support a diverse skill set (Hopkins, 2011:48).

**Why Local Food?**

Although many advantages occur because of industrialized, globalized agriculture, there are numerous disadvantages that have materialized due to this modernized food system. The production of food on a large scale has caused societies to become less engaged in their food
decisions, therefore creating a gap in knowledge about the origins of their food, and a disconnect between each other (Patel, 2007). So few people today are involved in food production, causing a disconnect between people and their food source. This disconnect occurs primarily with children, and their knowledge about where food originates. Local food is one of the ways to put power back in the hands of local consumers, so that they can vote with their food dollars (Patel, 2007). Additionally, “Developing local food production capacity is one of the ways to optimize food availability in the future” (Transition Stroud Report, 2008). Although local food might not solve the issue of food insecurity, it does enhance the local economy by supporting jobs and creating community viability. It also optimizes food availability in the future (Transition Stroud Report, 2008).

**Why Invest in Local Communities?**

Investing in local communities will strengthen them, stimulate jobs, build resilience, and foster connections among actors in the community. As Rob Hopkins of The Transition Network states, “[T]he best response we can make to our economic instability is to shift our support to an economy based on social justice, resilience and the protection of the biosphere … nothing else makes sense” (Hopkins, 2011:59).

A shift away from extractive investment, toward internal investment is a key in re-building a community and strengthening it. Extractive investment is money that is invested in a community for the sole purpose of extracting more money and moving it elsewhere - a leap frog effect - and while it might profit the community in some ways, it is most interested in the profit
that will be gained (Hopkins, 2013). Inward investment refers to money that flows into the community from various outside investments in order to stimulate the local economy. While this may be a viable option in strengthening the community, it could lead to economic growth at the expense of the community. Internal investment means a community investing in itself - it will establish new structures to allow for money to flow cyclically throughout the community as many times as possible (Hopkins, 2013).

Past examples of internal investing through the Transition movement are evident in the Bath & West Community Energy scenario in the UK, a local solar energy company where a key aspect of the company’s focus is to create an economic model that generates confidence in BWCE as a viable and reliable place to invest. BWCE creates, “projects that respond to the threat of climate change and peak oil, that retain economic value at the local level, and that offer people a direct say in how their energy is generated” (Hopkins, 2013:121). Another such example is in the Guelph context, with the local company Guelph Solar who meets the same community demands and goals as Bath & West Community Energy.

Investing in local economies is made easy when economic systems can re-structure themselves in order to make this investing more accessible. These alternative economic systems may come in the form of a time share, bartering system, or local currency. The Lewes Pound, a local currency, was launched in 2009 as a celebration of the local traders of Lewes in the UK. It marked the commemoration of the potential of a transitioned future. 10,000 notes were printed in
three days, and some were selling for over fifty pounds on Ebay. The Lewes Pound is now accepted by hundreds of traders in Lewes today (Hopkins, 2011).

**What is Transition: Implications on Human Health and Well-Being**

The saying “Der Mensch ist, was er ißt”, or translated from German to English, “You are what you eat”, can be traced back to over a century ago. In 1826, French psychologist and nutritionist Anthelme Brillat-Savarin wrote a book entitled *Physiologie du Gout, ou Meditations de Gastronomie Transcendante*. In this book, Brillat-Savarin wrote about the connection between nutrition, health, and the wellbeing of the soul, a concept that was very familiar amongst the thinkers of his time (Brillat-Savarin, J., 1826). The actual saying itself, “you are what you eat”, is a response to Brillat-Savarin’s book by Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach in an essay he wrote in 1863 entitled *Concerning Spiritualism and Materialism* (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2012). Neither Feuerbach nor Brillat-Savarin meant for the saying to be taken in a literal sense, but rather, they were explaining that the food one eats has impacts on one’s physical and mental state. Brillat-Savarin even declared, “Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are” (Brillat-Savarin, J., 1826:3).

Today, we have witnessed a vast shift away from whole foods that are locally-produced and mostly organic, into consuming convenience foods that are packed full of salts, sugars, and bad fats. We are now consuming 50% more times the amount of meat than we did in the 1960s (Chamberlin, 2009). As a result of this, we are experiencing higher level of diabetes, heart
disease, stroke, obesity and cancer, while also having a much larger impact on the earth (Chamberlin, 2009). The health of our planet is degrading, and along with it, the health of our communities and our bodies are suffering as well.

Food is a force that integrates many aspects of the human experience, including culture, education, community, health, and environment (The Meaning of Food Website, 2012). As a fundamental tool of cultural transmission, it is a fantastic forum for helping children’s social development, language and communication. The business of growing and foraging for food builds ecological and food literacy that will help lay healthy eating and activity patterns for life (The Meaning of Food Website, 2012). The Transition approach fosters this vision of food, and nurtures healthy communities through the growing and celebration of local, wholesome, organic food.

To understand the meaning “you are what you eat” in a social context is to understand the intricate players that participate within the system, or community, as a whole: the farmers, the teachers, the parents, the processors, the consumers, the children, the business owners. The system as a whole would not be the way that it is without each individual player. And to bridge the distance between each actor is the first step in re-building the well-being and resiliency of a community - this is a central notion to Transition.
**Transition Material, Knowledge Dissemination, and Outreach**

Some of the ramifications of the excitement that Transition creates include the development of literature, workshops, and films about this movement. Key literature used in the formation of this paper include Rob Hopkins’s books, *The Transition Handbook* (2008), *The Transition Companion* (2011), and *The Power of Just Doing Stuff* (2013). These books have been translated into many languages and have been printed worldwide. For more literature about the Transition movement, please visit the Resource section of this paper.

Many Transition Conferences have been held worldwide in the last eight years with hundreds of participants attending each one. Such conferences have been held in London, Liverpool, Sydney, Toronto, and Oregon. Naresh Guanrande and Sophie Banks have designed a two-day full immersion course called ‘Transition Training’, and since the development of this course in 2007, one hundred and fifty courses worldwide have been organized (Hopkins, 2011). Courses, workshops and training sessions have occurred in Portugal, Germany, Brazil, Canada, Italy, New Zealand, and parts of Asia by hundreds of trainers.

In the film industry, producers have taken a collaborative approach to filmmaking through the completion of ‘Transition 1.0’ - a wiki-film that is comprised of hundreds of hours of publicly submitted footage from Transition initiatives all around the world that producer Emma Goude edited into a cohesive film (Hopkins, 2011). A ‘Transition 2.0’ has since then also been created. Many independent films also exist on Youtube about the Transition movement in local
contexts. One of these movies (created by Katrin Sawatzky and Dan Beeson) follows the key actors of Transition Guelph to explore how this movement has enhanced the local community. A link to this film can be found in the Resource section of this paper.

It is interesting that Transition has only ever completed one press release, which was in 2009. Any articles, news clips, or photos ever produced by the media have been for the interest of Transition - the media sees the energy and buzz that is created in the local context, and the Transition story is one of hope, community, social justice, and creativity. Transition has so far been featured in Elle Magazine, The New Yorker, The Great British Railway Journeys, and on BBC’s The One Show (Hopkins, 2011) in a celebratory way that aligns with the Transition values.

**Critical Reflection**

Through exploration of existing literature on Transition, I have gained a holistic understanding of this movement, its origins, principles, and impacts. The strengths of the Transition framework are that it is collaborative (which inspires connection and co-working among its members); it is from the ground up (created by the people, for the people) and therefore eliminates exterior political and financial agendas; and it embodies a fluid process of facilitation and involvement which allows for all voices to be heard (members can flow in and out of the projects as they please, and decision-making processes are open and discussion-based). Through my own experience, these are components of Transition that work well in theory, but in
practice, can be daunting, draining and slow. Some of the weaknesses of this framework (on an organizational level) include trying to understand and navigate an organization that has no concrete structure and remains leaderless; and trying to keep the momentum going when decision-making processes are lengthy and are made by a small group of people.

I discovered inconsistencies in the literature and found that what was conveyed in the literature contradicted my personal experience of Transition. Although, in theory, Transition is meant to be leaderless in nature, at an organizational level in the Guelph context, it has not been until very recently. Locally, Transition Guelph was created by two founders who remained as the head decision makers for many years. This provided structure and organization for its members. It was not until last year that they decided to step back from TG to ensure its organizational succession. Today, as Transition Guelph attempts to run off of a ‘shared leadership’ model, it involves a slew of additional challenges, particularly in decision-making processes.

One of the largest questions I had, in addition to uncovering the general experience of membership in Transition, was why participants remained engaged at the organizational level, when (through participant observation and through my own experience) there existed high levels of burnout? What kept people involved and passionate? Additionally, I craved to know more of the individual transformational experiences of Transition, as I had experienced myself. Burnout, continual involvement, and transformational change are three concepts that are not explored in the literature. I was unsatisfied when little of the existing Transition literature covered these questions, which also sparked my interest to continue this study.
Conclusion

Through exploration of why Transition emerged (as a response to peak oil and climate change) how it functions (through the discussion of its key philosophies, theories, and principles that it is built on); and what Transition is and how it is embodied (by looking through the lens of its social, psychological, political, economic and human health implications), we have discovered that the Transition movement is a direct response to a changing climate, both culturally and environmentally. The systems we currently function within in the West no longer serve us as a whole, but rather solely serve people with wealth and power. By journeying through the ins and outs of the Transition movement, it is evident that Transition is a viable alternative paradigm to function within as we reach an age of post-oil. Transition functions effectively because it is context-specific, created locally from the bottom-up, decreases our reliance on oil, while re-gaining connectedness to our food source, each other, and ourselves. Transition is a social experiment on a massive scale, and it urges us to take action - together - today or order to build a holistic, resilient, vibrant, and connected future.
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter explores the methodology and ‘research angle’ with which I approached this study. It also discusses my plan of inquiry so that this study could be replicated. The methodology of this study includes strategies and principles from heuristic research, phenomenological research, and narrative research. The plan of inquiry includes how I determined my sample selection (where and from data is collected), methods for data collection, the interview design, guide, and process, and finally, how the data was analyzed.

Heuristic Research

Heuristic research is a type of research that begins with a personal question or experience, but can be applied to a wider context. The aim of heuristic research is discovery through self-inquiry, inner exploration, and dialogue (Moustakas, 1994). It lies on the premise that humans make meaning out of experiences, and to understand these meanings can lead to understanding human behaviours. Heuristic processes incorporate self-discoveries and creative self-processes (Moustakas, 1990). The researcher first begins with searching within to understand and describe their own experiences in the topic (in my case, the Transition movement). The researcher writes his or her own story that can be expressed in a myriad of ways - art, words, personal documents, etc. (Moustakas, 1994). Then, with the contributions of the research participants, a blended description and understanding of the research is created.
Heuristic research focuses on the wholeness of an experience, and searches for the essence of an experience rather than an explanation. The data generated from heuristic research is valuable in understanding human behaviour and individual experiences, two components that make up a unified relationship of subject and object (Moustakas, 1994).

I decided to use heuristic research because I desired using a methodology that was meaningful to me, and could help me to navigate my own experiences with the Transition movement. Further, I wanted to investigate the human experience of Transition. Having been involved in the organization and completed various research projects with them in the past, I am deeply rooted in Transition Guelph and am on my own journey with the Transition Movement.

**Phenomenology and Narrative Research**

This is a phenomenological study, and attempts to understand the ‘lived’ experience and perceptions of membership in the Transition movement. A phenomenological study focuses on a few participants to gain an in-depth understanding of their lived experience. The purpose of a phenomenological study is to deepen the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon through extensive time spent with each participant of the study. Through following a phenomenological approach, I gained rich data from the experiences of individuals.
Phenomenology can also encompass narrative research. My research surrounds the life experience of humans, and through the use of narrative research, I was able to re-tell and share each story that the participants shared with me through their oral history interviews.

**Seudo-Ethnographer**

Although this research does not stem from an anthropological body of knowledge, it is important to acknowledge that in this study, I am an ethnographer of sorts, as I am studying a group of people with whom I already have membership (Transition Guelph). Because of my previous involvement with this group, I have already built relationships and connections with individuals within the organization, and therefore act as the gatekeeper to this study. Trust has previously been established, and once I had decided on the criteria for sampling, contact was made with certain members from Transition Guelph. Through our trusting and open relationships, participants agreed to partake in the study.

**Plan of Inquiry**

The term ‘Plan of Inquiry’ is borrowed from Josselson and Lieblich (2003) as an alternative term to ‘Methods’ because it emphasizes how one thinks about the research, rather than viewing it as a procedure.
Sample Selection

A purposeful sample was identified for this research through criterion sampling. I elected purposeful sampling to increase the scope of the data explored and to uncover multiple perspectives. The criteria I used to determine my research participants included, i) individuals that were heavily involved in the organizational aspects of Transition Guelph; and ii) individuals that were long-term members (minimum one year involvement in the organization). A total of nine members met my criteria, and seven were designated for contact, leaving two alternative candidates in case the appointed participants could no longer commit to the study.

Because of my long-standing involvement in Transition, coupled with friendships I have developed within the organization, the initial contact made with potential participants regarding this research was through casual conversation. I gained a general sense of who might be interested in participating. Once I had seven interested members, I approached each member with a contact e-mail (see Figure 1 in Appendix). In this e-mail, I reminded each participant of the conversation we had shared regarding the research. Attached to this e-mail was a formal introduction letter. In this letter, I formally introduced myself and the research interests, and extended the invitation for the participant to engage in an in-depth interview with me, or in other words, the telling of their story. Within two weeks I had the full commitment of seven Transition Guelph members. Through individual e-mails regarding the particulars and scheduling of each participant, each oral history was confirmed.
**Interview Design**

Part of the central theme of Transition is creating a new world and re-writing our cultural narrative. To achieve my research objectives, a qualitative study using semi-structured interview questions that guided an oral history process was executed. Semi-structured interviews that ask the story of each participant inspires freedom of expression, it fosters creativity, and it levels out power imbalances as the participant gets to dictate the direction of the dialogue. For the purpose of my research, and its nature as being phenomenological and exploratory, in-depth interviews that draw out stories from participants were most appropriate. This approach allowed me to probe for depth and seek clarification when needed.

**Interview Guide**

I conducted seven in-depth interviews. With the support of my advisor, seventeen questions were created. The first questions pertained to the participants’ initial involvement and experience with Transition; the middle questions covered their current experience and perceptions of Transition; and the final questions looked to discover members’ in-depth relationship to the movement and how they envisioned their future engagement. See Figure 3 in the Appendix for the Interview Guide.

Although the semi-structured interview questions were determined prior to the interview, not all questions were asked to each participant. Each interview was fluid, organic and an
opportunity for the participant to share their story. Some of my pre-conceived questions deemed appropriate in some scenarios, and in others, they did not. The questions were open-ended to ensure that my own perceptions of this phenomenon did not cloud the research. To ensure a certain amount of continuity throughout the research, the first two and last two questions of the interview guide were asked to each participant.

**Interview Process**

I invited each participant to engage in the interview wherever they felt most comfortable. Five contributors decided to hold the interview in their home; for one participant it was most convenient to conduct the interview at their place of work; and one preferred to meet in a cafe. All of the interviews were held within a four week period. Each interview began with a hug, as I had prior relationships to each of the contributors. It was easy to establish initial warmth and comfort with each participant through a quick catch-up and check-in. Subsequent to our chit chat, I provided a brief synopsis of my research interest, purpose of the study, and the research objectives. Prior to officially starting the interview, each participant read and signed the consent form provided, and gave their verbal consent to be audio recorded. A recording test was performed, and once we were ready to begin, the recording device was turned on and the interview begun. A back-up recorder was present, in case of any technical difficulties.

I refrained from taking notes during the interview. The environment that was established was warm and comfortable, like a deep, heartfelt conversation, and it was important for me to be
fully present in conversation and not disrupt through note taking. If a participant’s comment was foggy or their tone unclear, I felt free to ask for clarification or repetition. They felt this same freedom, and this opened space for an honest conversation to occur.

As previously mentioned, each interview started with the same questions: Can you offer a brief description of your life here in Guelph? Can you describe how you came to participate in Transition Guelph and what motivated you to do so? The first question provided a baseline context for me to work off of. Some participants asked for clarification and I responded by sharing that I desired a holistic snapshot of their daily life - their career life, family life, location, age, personal relationships, etc. Each response provided me with different insight, and this information was helpful for me in bringing context to their daily lives. The second question was used as a starting point, or a jumping off point, in their oral history. This question provided me with a wealth of information and insight into each participant’s journey with Transition. At times, participants would cover questions that I already had earmarked to ask, and when they did, I made a mental note of it to decrease redundancy. If the questions required further fleshing out, I would ask probing questions to expand upon that particular idea.

It can be seen in my introductory letter that each participant was informed of their time commitment to this interview (between thirty minutes and one hour). However, in many instances, the interviews ranged between one and two hours. When this overtime occurred, I made sure to honour the participants’ time commitment and proposed three options: continuing on with the interview; wrapping it up at that moment; or discontinuing the interview at that time.
and reengaging with it at another time. Every participant eagerly agreed to continue, as some even stated that it felt “refreshing” and “therapeutic” to participate.

Throughout the interview, there were points of sensitivity and tenderness. More than once, I found myself teary eyed at the experience of the participant sharing their deepest transformations. I felt honoured to hear their stories of transformation through their involvement in the Transition movement. And, as each interview closed, there was still a mutual excitement lingering. This spilled into post-recorded conversation, and often times, I would re-start the recording device to capture the richness that occurred when the interview was complete.

**Analysis**

As each interview ranged between one and two hours, the interview transcription process was lengthy, labourious, and tedious. Because each interview was so in-depth and rich, I found that I expended my emotional energy during the interview and had no energy left for the transcription post-interview. I completed the oral histories within a four week time period, took two weeks to process the information internally, and then spent a three week time period transcribing the interviews. I transcribed the interviews verbatim into electronic format to ensure that I captured the nuances and meanings behind each sigh, silence, and word stumble. It was important to do so, as it captured each participant’s struggle and contemplation with putting their story to words.
Once the transcription phase was complete, I took some time to sit with the raw data and meditate on it. I read the transcriptions over and over before attempting to take notes. As I re-read the transcripts for the fourth time, themes began emerging from each interview. Every interview received a sticky note on its title page with jotted notes of my brief discoveries. I entitled this note “This is a story of …”. Some general themes that emerged included connection, support, and self-exploration, to name a few. I re-read the transcripts yet again to add on to the list of themes as they emerged from each interview. This time through, I also highlighted what I intuitively felt as significant quotations from each participant. These quotes would later be used to sprinkle my findings with context to ground my discoveries, and they were also used in the final Stories. While this initial note-taking and theme-emerging process provided some order, managing the data still felt unresolved and daunting to me. I re-evaluated how I would proceed.

Through consultation with my research advisor, in order to make sense of the data, I composed a story about each participant’s journey with the Transition movement. I went back to each transcript and derived a story from their oral history, while also being very aware of my influence and interpretations of their story as a researcher. I used direct quotes whenever possible to ensure accuracy and richness of their experience. Once each story was complete (ranging from five to eight pages), I sent each participant their story (see the Feedback Letter, Figure 5 in the Appendix). They had an opportunity to verify the data and co-create the research with me by adding anything they felt was meaningful, and omitting aspects of the story that they did not see fit. Once the changes were incorporated, I went back to each story to fulfill the analysis phase.
I decided to analyze the data manually, as I am not comfortable with data analysis software, nor do I appreciate how it mechanizes an organic process. I am also a visual learner, and find comfort in seeing colour-coordinated systems on a large wall. From each story, twenty to thirty-five themes emerged. Each theme was written on a separate note, colour-coordinated to the participant, and stuck to the wall. By the time I had each participant on the analysis wall, it it looked like a sea of colours. Through stepping back and reading all of the emergent themes, I noticed that there were commonalities among all of them. I arranged and re-arranged them into groupings of common themes and these commonalities were then clustered together. I noticed that each story also followed relatively the same process that could be categorized into four main steps: their \textit{inspiration} for joining Transition; the \textit{impacts} that involvement had on the participant; the \textit{inner journey} they endured through their involvement; and how they envision their \textit{individual future engagement}.

The initial wall of coloured notes was then organized first into each individual story, and within each story, was further organized into how and if each theme fit into the four steps identified. The outcome of grouping these steps, which I later coined “The Four I’s: Development of Personal Resiliency”, produced a summary of each story. The complete mind-map and system that was derived to explain the data can be found in Figure 6 of the Appendix. Together with the stories, this mind-map formed the basis of analysis from which I wrote the Findings and Discussion Chapters.
CHAPTER 4 THEIR STORIES

Introduction

Stories have the power to shape and re-create the world as we perceive it. Through the telling and sharing of these stories, new perspectives of the Transition movement are explored and understood. Seven stories from participants of Transition Guelph are shared in this chapter, each beautifully unique, yet sharing similar themes of community, support, and building resiliency (inner and outer). These stories offer insight to each individual’s experience in the Transition movement. Some are long-standing members, and others came into the movement in more recent years. The stories represent each participant’s journey with Transition, and the presentation of them was co-created with the researcher.

Ruth’s Story

In her late teens and early twenties, Ruth’s interest and agency for social and environmental justice blossomed - she began understanding, on a deeper level, the harm and pain that industrial society was having on nature and human beings. She shares how jarring it was for her to live in a society that was so individualistic, competitive, goal-oriented, hierarchical, and destructive, while feeling at her core that this was not the way humanity was meant to live.

She became curious about the feminist movement and as the second wave of feminism spread, found a fit with its perspectives. For Ruth, there was also a flowering of interest and
awareness of Aboriginal teachings, their wisdom regarding the connection of the Earth and other living things; and simultaneously, she sought out wisdom from the Eastern traditions of Buddhism and its ideals of no-harm. All of these teachings formed a platform for Ruth to be able to view the world in a holistic way, and perhaps most important of all, her upbringing of being connected to nature, animals and birds, and spending time in the forest, led her to see it as a living, breathing system.

These teachings gave her a sense of vitality and goodness and comfort in a world that seemed so uneasy and overwhelming. This way of living “felt better and more wholesome than a lot of the human relationships” she had in her life. In her early adulthood, Ruth was part of the ‘back-to-the-land’ movement. She and her partner at the time purchased a plot of wooded land in Northern Michigan and built a small cabin there, living on the land for nearly fifteen years. This was the closest to nature that Ruth had ever lived, intimately connected to the elements and the resources that nature offered.

Their long-term vision was to build a community that could live together, with the intention of being environmentally sustainable and harmonious, but this never became a reality. Living on forty acres, with neighbours’ properties at a distance, it was nearly impossible to co-create this vision. They also didn’t have the skills, knowledge or enough time to learn, develop a vision and collaborate on this with others. There simply wasn’t enough capacity to make this vision a reality. Over the years, Ruth found this lifestyle to be isolating - she thought that this way of life was the ‘answer’, and as time went on, it became clear that it wasn’t. The partnership
that she was in came to a close, and by chance, Ruth met Sam (whom she would later marry) in Northern Michigan.

Sam was already established in Guelph, and since Ruth was fairly flexible and open to a new beginning, she decided to venture to Guelph and reside with Sam. What drew Ruth in was her craving to be part of a community; “I needed to be a part of a people world”. Once in Guelph, Ruth joined the visual artist and music communities. She didn’t get heavily involved with any social or environmental movement straight away.

She returned to school to study therapy, practiced as a therapist, and eventually joined a health team as a couples and family counsellor. If you’ve ever met Ruth, you would know instantly this she was made for this type of work. Her open heart, kind spirit, gentle nature and openness make her the ideal person to support anyone on their journey.

Ruth’s initial knowing of the Transition movement was an evolution. By another chance encounter, she attended a workshop offered at the Hillside music festival in Guelph. The topic of the workshop was related to ‘how to live with the emotional experience of being alive in these times’. Ruth shares that she was so thankful to have attended this workshop, because it opened up an entire area of inquiry for her that she had never explored before - the newly developing field of eco-psychology, which extended her interest in systems theory, and proposed concepts and methods to foster the relationship between human emotional well-being and other living
systems. At this workshop, she was also introduced to the resources of eco-philosopher Joanna Macy.

Ruth noticed that Joanna Macy’s work centred exactly around these topics and developing a group experiential process to envision and create a better future. Knowing that Joanna was already in her eighties gave Ruth a sense of urgency to connect with her as soon as possible. Ruth began working intensively with Joanna Macy, and on the third retreat that she went on, Ruth was introduced to the Transition Movement. She was ignited by the idea of it - “I saw this movement as such a beautiful way to increase the effectiveness and reach toward mutually supportive relationships in our community and create the world that we wanted.”

Ruth came back from that retreat with fire to create a Transition initiative in Guelph. She recognized that there was already so much good happening in her community - organizations existing for social and environmental change, forward-thinking people, and changemakers. Ruth saw Transition as a way to potentially connect all of the good that already existed and to strengthen Guelph’s change network. After many, many conversations, Ruth and her partner decided to hold a meeting to gauge the interest among their community members in starting a Transition movement in Guelph.

Transition at its core is acknowledging the world as it is (built on cheap oil, depending on cheap labour, and exploiting human and environmental resources to feed a consumeristic economy), and envisioning and acting on creative solutions to build a more equitable and
resilient future. It’s created by people on the ground (rather than governments or advocacy
groups) to ensure its accountability to the people that created it and to truly serve the context it
was created in.

To Ruth and Sam’s surprise, the capacity of the room during that initial Transition Guelph
meeting was bursting. They presented the idea to the audience and the response was
overwhelming; “people were just excited about a chance to do constructive, positive actions to
build new ways of living and to take the good that’s already happening and make it more robust.”
Ruth found that people were hungry to be connected and take some sort of positive action. With
that, Transition Guelph was created with a patchwork of people with various skill-sets.

Ruth shares that parts of her were also skeptical; “I thought to myself, who knows what
could work here and how much of a difference we could actually make?” Self-doubt also came
up for her - could she do this, was she the right person, could she bring her skills to this work in a
good way? “It’s been a huge growing, learning, thrilling experience for me, even from very early
on.” Ruth also discovered the more pragmatic parts of starting an organization like organizing
people, writing e-mails and keeping lists, and promoting events. These were daunting and
exciting for Ruth, who did not have any background in these business areas.

For many years, this work was incredibly satisfying for Ruth. She also felt a sense of
urgency and believed that this organization needed to move very quickly for change. As the state
of the world worsened, it felt important for Ruth to “throw [herself] into it and get these changes underway as soon as possible”. It was exciting and energizing for her.

Ruth’s life quickly became fuller than it ever had been before - she was still working and had a private practice, she was training and teaching therapists at the University of Guelph, maintaining her home and her personal relationships, while collaborating with others to run a new organization. She found how difficult it was to balance these things and soon found herself falling behind on many aspects of her life. At times, she felt like she ‘skated up to the edge of exhaustion’ and got a real taste of what burn out was and how long it takes to recover from it. After several years of intensive involvement, she found that in her most strenuous times, she would become moody, lose a sense of well-being and capacity, and discouragement would set in more easily.

This led Ruth to inform herself more on the importance of self-care in recent years. She has noticed that using up all of one’s resources is a common thing that occurs in our society; “we live in an economy that encourages us to extract the maximum from the [human] resource without thinking of long-term sustainability and without respecting the overall well-being of that living system.” For Ruth, the importance of living in Transition also means treating herself gently, with the long-term in mind, just as she would her community and the natural environment.
Upon noticing her burnout, Ruth also recognized that much of TG relied on very few people and how this was not a healthy state for an organization to be in.

“I believe that diversity of viewpoints and diversity of energies and styles and personal capacities are the lifeblood of any collaborative endeavour … and I believe that the healthiest form of society that I want to bring into being is not a leader-led, hierarchical way of doing things, it’s collaboration, it’s group effort, it’s from the ground up”.

Ruth wanted to embody this and so she committed to move leadership and skills more and more into other people’s hands. Just over a year ago, Ruth and her partner decided to take a step back from the organizational components of Transition Guelph. Ruth finds this transition away to be “amazing and inspiring - to see how people took up project planning and set up structures and communication methods to bring about a more robust TG …”

Today, Ruth celebrates being in Guelph for nearly 20 years. She is working with the Guelph Family Health team part-time so that she can spend more time with family, turn her home into an urban homestead, read and learn. She is now also focusing her energies on mentoring people in different ways. She has been facilitating and working with professional and citizen groups to support healthy relationships and communication techniques. She has a desire to pass on her learning and resources to people who wish to learn them.
Ruth believes that Transition has been transformative for her. She describes her life to be richer and fuller now than it ever has been. She feels more embedded in a home community. Transition has also taught Ruth how to embody its principles into her own life, both in how she lives in conjunction with her community and environment, and in how she treats herself. She understands the importance of balance in how she spends her time. Ruth says she had to un-learn many ‘colonized’ ways of being (individualistic, consumeristic, and competitive) and is grateful for these lessons. She feels that her sense of compassion has broadened and strengthened - “it’s certainly ignited more keenly and in more of mature way my fire for the wellbeing of all things, equity and justice …”

And in her own sense of self, Ruth has discovered some hidden capabilities, for instance, her ability to lead others. She also feels safe to share her inner wonderings and emotions (even the difficult ones). She has become more trusting of herself and of others, and has gained a sense of inner resilience. She has also cultivated a sense of inner capacity, or ability to “bounce back” after upset. - “I know now that, in the end, I’ll be okay.”

Alicia’s Story

Six years ago, Alicia was living in Calgary with her partner, working a nine-to-five office job and feeling unsettled. She was looking to live a bigger, more meaningful and fulfilling life. She attended an EcoConference in the city where she met the founder of Transition Guelph, Sally Ludwig. Alicia was enlivened with hearing about what Transition was, and she felt inspired to
start a Transition initiative in Calgary. Up until that point, no such initiative existed in her community.

Although this satisfied her temporarily, Alicia felt like she needed something more. Still hungry for knowledge, travel, and meaning, Alicia and her husband set out to complete a one year skill-building mission to New Zealand where they learned hands-on homesteading artistrys. Upon finishing this adventure, the two knew that they would be moving to Ontario, although the exact location was undecided. Alicia remembered the lasting impression that Sally and the Transition Guelph community had made on her - it all was in line with what she wanted to create and be a part of - and with that, the decision was made to nest in Guelph.

On her first day in Guelph, Alicia attended a Transition meeting. This first meeting was energizing for her, and she later went on to organize the Guelph Community Orchard Project - a community orchard created by the community, for the community at a local church. She felt welcomed and connected to the community straight away, and within weeks was offered a job through Transition Guelph. She worked with TG for one year as the Resilience Festival coordinator.

Alicia’s entire life became Transition, it was all-consuming, and as she shares this story she talks about how burnt out she felt. Alicia was working for Transition as her day job, attending Transition meetings in the evenings and organizing workshops for Transition on the weekends. She felt like the general participation in TG was dwindling, and that she wasn’t
spending enough time focusing on her own interests and recharging her batteries. After
organizing the Resilience Festival, Alicia strongly felt like she needed to take a break - “I just
needed to do something for myself, because I was always giving so much, putting on classes for
others and I wasn’t getting enough back”.

Alicia also felt the facilitation techniques used by Transition weighing on her. Seeing
herself as an ‘actions-based’ individual she would find the long-winded and discussion-heavy TG
meetings frustrating. At times Alicia felt like she craved leaving a meeting with a “golden nugget
of information or action” and instead left feeling frustrated and empty-handed. She loved the
facilitation styles and the open fluidity of Transition in theory, but she found that in practice, it
became draining.

When she became aware of her frustrations and burnout, Alicia decided to start saying
‘no’. She needed a better balance and, through her journey with TG, found her voice again. For
Alicia, finding a balance means having more home time. She has a strong desire to spend more
time with her husband and friends, take classes and to try things that were different. Her
commitment to balance now has Alica shifting her entire reality. She fundamentally believes in
loving where you work and being paid for what you love to do and she has set up her life to be
able to live this way everyday. As a new mother, Alicia feels the urgency of this life shift more
than ever.
This shift has not been an easy one - Alicia and her husband’s journey had its challenges. They wouldn’t always receive the support they desired. They took risks, made enormous lifestyles changes, and put faith in the unknown. And as a result, they experience a life so rich and so full of love. They are now a part of a vibrant community that they can rely on for homesteading support (a dairy farm that delivers them milk, a beef farmer they receive meat from, a CSA that provides them vegetables in the winter time); they live in a beautiful home with a dog, new baby, backyard chickens and plenty of gardens; and they both do what they love and love what they do. What nurtures Alicia today is the support of her community and the common vision that everyone shares for a resilient future.

The teachings and principles from Transition, coupled with her own passion for re-skilling, has led Alicia to become an entrepreneur. Over a year ago, she started a business called Minga Skill-Building Hub, a school that brings in local community specialists to teach neighbours the skills that our grandmothers and fathers would have known (like cheese-making, butchery, beer making, and raising backyard hens, for example). The business is about passing skills on from generation to generation and it is also about keeping the expertise within the community; or in other words, taught by the community, for the community. Alicia sees how Minga and Transition fit effortlessly together and can co-exist - “Transition is social permaculture and my business is social permaculture … it’s just so engrained in everything I do … my philosophies, the way I interact with people and the way I think about community is really all about creating resiliency and a place where people can flourish”.

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For Alicia, Transition is a philosophy that is at the core of her belief system - Transition makes happy, healthy, successful communities through its ability to connect, teach, share, and celebrate. Transition is also a lifestyle for her and her family. Although she is not as heavily involved in the organizational side of TG anymore, Alicia still lives the transitioned lifestyle every day through connecting with her neighbours, knowing where her food comes from, being self-sufficient as best as they can with food and energy, and having a strong support network of people who care about her.

Reflecting back now, Alicia can distinguish her earlier involvement with Transition and how she felt like a “workshop junkie”; “I was just filling my time with meetings and workshops but they weren’t filling me … I was giving too much, and to things that I didn’t feel called to do, like computer work and mundane tasks”. She so badly wanted live the Transition lifestyle. And when she started resenting her work choices, she was able to notice that if she let go of the organizational commitments she had made, it would open up space for her to explore new avenues and find fulfillment. She can see now that through letting go and stepping back from a leadership role within TG, she was able to make time to fully embrace the movement as a lifestyle rather than just a job.

Alicia feels that her paradigm has been shifted through her work with TG. Being involved in Transition has showed her that she doesn’t have to hate her job and that she can actually get paid for what she loves to do. It has taught her that community is just as important as family. It has allowed her to make an impact on her immediate world and change the negatives into
positives. It has also transformed her into a trusting person. Alicia shares that she is much more open with people, open to hearing their stories and accepting where they are at in their journey. “I do want to say that Transition has changed my life - it’s permaculture in a social setting. And I am such a people person - I love how it is so socially connected. Transition has fundamentally changed my life”.

**Clinton’s Story**

Clinton wasn’t raised with any particular religious beliefs or within any organized community. The concept of ‘community’ was never discussed in his family, although he was raised in a “big, loving family”. His childhood was quite “normal” - he played sports, went to school, and always had a love of the outdoors.

When he completed high school, Clinton decided to study Environmental Toxicology at The University of Guelph. He lived in the South end of town, attended classes, and started seeing a young woman. One evening, she suggested that they attend a movie screening in downtown Guelph hosted by Transition Guelph.

After seeing this movie, entitled *The Age of Stupid* (a film about climate change, set in the future), Clinton recalls feeling “woken up” and thinking that he should start picking up garbage. Remembering this moment makes Clinton chuckle, as now his involvement in TG has
stretched far beyond his initial ventures at making change - “we all have to start somewhere!” he states with conviction.

After this introduction with the Transition Guelph community, Clinton began attending general meetings. He felt moved to contribute further, and in 2011, for the first ever Resilience Festival, Clinton and his friends volunteered to source all of the food for the Earth Hour Potluck. Through connecting with local farms, restaurants, and community members, his small team put on a feast for the TG volunteers. This evening is imprinted on Clinton’s memory as he recalls being taken with the flow of the event - people floating organically in and out of conversation, cleaning dishes, putting away chairs, contributing with enthusiasm - had Clinton feeling like, “This is really nice! I’m not stressed, I’m with good people, eating good food … this is a good life!”

His engagement with TG after this point was enlivening. He became excited and renewed about joining an open, warm and supportive community. Prior to his involvement, Clinton remembers feeling crippled and depressed by the state of the world and feeling like the issues of the world were “way too big … and … beyond me”. His participation in TG brought about a sense of solidarity and support with his community members in knowing that he wasn’t alone on his journey of understanding the world and changing it for the better. At times, Clinton even skipped home from meetings where he learned about tangible ways to change his life - like fermenting or growing food. He was part a community that saw social and environmental change as small steps that contribute to a larger shift and this energized him.
Clinton has been volunteering with Transition Guelph for five years, and he considers it his life now - or lifestyle - rather than something that he does as a hobby. He coins the term “vol-living-teering”. He is involved in a multitude of ways today - he’s shifted into the urban food working group, he sits on the Transition Guelph Board, and he is part of the steering committee. In addition, Clinton has continued his studies at The University of Guelph in Plant Agriculture, a program offered through the Ontario Agriculture College. He is able to weave the fabric of his studies together with his interest and involvement in Transition to create a holistic and meaningful life that he is excited to wake up and live every day.

The principles from Transition and permaculture have provided Clinton with a framework that he can apply to all areas of his life. The values of people care, earth care and fair share have guided his everyday actions and have helped him live life in a more intentional way. He feels like he has been transitioned in his skill set (he has learned how to grow his own food, how to connect meaningfully with his community, among other things) and now feels that he can carry these skills wherever he travels to next; most likely the west coast.

Clinton feels that Transition nurtures him both as a leader and as a follower, and he refers to this as “double-edged leadership”. Transition is based off of re-skilling, “which happens through sharing skills and the recognition that everyone has a gift to offer, and this comes from us supporting each other and nurturing each other’s gifts”. Clinton sees himself as a leader and having the ability to share/teach his practical skills to others, while also remaining open and
eager to learn new things. The TG community allow him to live out his leadership traits and also support his desire to follow others.

He also recognizes the difficulty that lies with a leaderless organization. Since Sally and Chris’s stepping back, there has been a restructuring of the organization. TG has recently incorporated as a not-for-profit organization which has brought help to the liability side of things. Clinton see’s this change as a “huge learning curve” and he sees the consequences that take place as a result of this; “we need to be aware of these consequences and creatively respond to them”.

With his heavy involvement in the movement, Clinton also mentions feeling burnt out when he doesn’t take advantage of the resources (like sharing circles, support groups, or workshops) that are available to him through the Inner Transition Network. He recalls experiencing a lot of blame and shame around his actions in the world and feeling “overwhelmed with the state of the world”. At one point, he shares his concern with bringing children into a world that is so destructive, or his fear for drinking water because it may be contaminated. Attending support circles through the Inner Transition Network have given Clinton the community, strength and support he needed to continue onward. He is able to share his thoughts and experiences through dialogue, rather than in sit in dark monologue.

Transition has changed Clinton’s life; “it opened me up to a way of living that wasn’t destroying my life … instead of having other people provide me with a way to live, I am now full of the knowledge, skills, and community to do that myself … it’s allowed me to take back
my power and have other people take back theirs”. He describes Transition as being transformative for him in his ability to live a life of intention. Now when he sets out to do an activity, he thinks about how it will affect others, the environment, and have ripples on a global scale (for example, his energy consumption).

Additionally, Clinton shares how being open and vulnerable have deepened his relationships to his community. Upon sharing some of his inner thoughts with his peers, he noticed that they were crying and at first he questioned and judged their reactions, and right after, he realized that he too was teary-eyed. He described it as the human experience that connects us all - “I am this person, I totally relate to them, I am you and we share things. We’re not alone.”

**Jenn’s Story**

When Jenn was young, she dabbled in activism - she got lit up with certain causes, became heavily involved, found that her enthusiasm would wane, and then she withdrew her engagement - again and again. Over time, she noticed how tiring and dispiriting it was to over-extend her involvement in these initiatives. She was burnt out, frustrated and didn’t want to have anything to do with activism as time passed; “I remember thinking at the time that it would take something pretty extraordinary to get me back into some sort of social/environmental movement”.
At the turn of the millennium, the state of the world began having deeper and deeper impacts on Jenn and her partner; economic collapse, social injustices, environmental degradation, among others, were causing sadness and unsettlement in Jenn. She shares that she felt paralyzed thinking about the direction that humanity was headed and recalls not having a strong sense of how to respond to the changes.

She notes that her “godsend” was Joanna Macy and The Work that Reconnects. Jenn’s wife decided to attend a Joanna Macy retreat before Jenn did. At this retreat, her partner learned of the Transition movement and brought this information home to Jenn. The two became very excited by this grassroots, solution-oriented and celebratory movement. Her partner immediately jumped in whole heartedly and began connecting with community members and organizations in Guelph on how they could make a local Transition initiative come to life. Jenn was a little more cautious before jumping in. Although she was moved and excited about the possibility of a Transition movement in Guelph, Jenn felt slightly skeptical and intimidated because she had never participated in something like this before. She decided that she would “sit behind and sort of just watch what happens”.

Months later, after attending her own Joanna Macy workshop, Jenn found that the teachings resonated deeply. During the final activity of the workshop when participants were asked to set an intention on how to keep their energy alive, much to her surprise, Jenn declared that she was going to start a Transition movement in Guelph. “I almost looked around the room trying to figure out who had said that and then I realized that it had been me!”
From that moment on, Jenn and her partner collaborated and initiated the first steps in making their dream a reality. After mining the level of interest from their friends and community, they were advised to make a commitment and hold the first meeting.

Jenn shares the story of the first ever TG meeting - it was a cold and rainy night on December 1st, 2008. The event had only been promoted through word of mouth and Jenn recalls thinking that if they received ten attendees she would be ecstatic. There were over fifty attendees that night and their enthusiasm was powerful - people said things like, “I’ve been waiting for something like this to come along for years”. As Jenn remembers this moment, her voice cracks and her eyes swell with tears. It is clear how moving this was for her.

She also recalls feeling completely unprepared. She had no idea how to harness the energy that was gathered at that first event. The next couple of years were spent trying to play catch-up and to keep the energy alive, while still maintaining an organized Transition Guelph structure. Eventually things started balancing out and day-to-day tasks became smoother. Jenn and her partner approached many different organizations with the intention of learning from them and looking for ways to collaborate; “We probably made good connections with about a dozen organizations, all of which welcomed us with open arms … our approach to every organization was to ask how we could help them”. Jenn describes this as “diffusing” any sort of suspicion that may have surrounded the development of a new organization in an already-established network of social/environmental initiatives.
The development of Guelph’s Transition initiative was based off of instinct and an abundance of collaboration that happened through dialogue - having no road mapped out ahead of them and no prior experience, Jenn and her partner carved out their vision organically, with the help of their eager friends and community. The nature of the Transition movement is flexible (it changes with whoever is part of it), it is malleable (it can be shaped, created and altered by its participants), and it is completely contextual (it’s made by the people, for the people). Today, Transition Guelph is one of the most successful and expansive Transition initiatives in Canada.

At the thought of the vibrant and loving community that started TG, and reflecting on how it has expanded since, Jenn chokes up. “These are people who just give themselves so generously. They don’t expect pats on the back or a big reward, they do it because it’s just them. It’s so incredible and powerful and inspiring and it keeps me going.” For Jenn, being a part of the Transition Guelph community brings a sense of belonging, or, a sense of “being with your tribe”.

Jenn has walked her own journey as a transgender person and shares the impact that being part of a loving and expansive community has had on her through her own transition into being a woman. She talks about the day she decided to share her story with the wider community;

“…Of the two-to-three hundred people that I shared it with, not one person expressed anything less than whole hearted support and encouragement and acceptance for me as a transgender person. It just says something so powerful about the community that we’ve created
here - the Transition community - we’ve created a space for trust and safety and commonality of spirit”.

When it comes to the topic of balance, Jenn feels that she is able to balance her efforts, passions, and personal, professional, and emotional parts of her life fairly well. Her marriage is almost friction free because both parties are dedicated to the same things, share the same values and goals, interests and activities, and understand one another very well. In addition, their work with Transition compliments one another. As an introvert, Jenn enjoys focusing on maintaining the Transition website, writing articles, and reading, while her partner focuses on the more social aspects of Transition, like her former role as President of TG. Jenn left her full-time employment in 2010 to dedicate most of her time to creating TG, and she has no regrets.

Jenn receives inspiration, motivation and support from the TG community, and it is also still a reality for her to experience stress, burnout and frustration. She acknowledges all of the hard work that TG is doing, and still recognizes the gulf between what is possible and what is being done. She would like to see the wider community becoming more resilient to food interruptions, economic instability and peak oil. The feeling of burnout comes when so much effort gets put into the organization and making change, and yet, there is still an immense amount of things that could be done.

So what keeps her going in this movement, even through the feelings of despair and overwhelm? Her daughter. Jenn has a deep connection and admiration for her daughter who has a
passion for the environment and is changing the world through this. Jenn is committed to creating a better world for her daughter and for generations to come. And for Jenn, this is no lofty concept because, at the end of the day, she believes she gave it everything she could; “that’s what drives me and I know I’ve got a long way to go, but at least I’ve got my feet on that path”.

Jenn has also unearthed aspects of herself through the Transition movement. She has discovered that she is a natural leader and enjoys bringing people together for a common purpose. She has also tapped into public speaking and being able to share her stories with others. As a musician this comes as a surprise to Jenn, as previously, she would be panic-stricken without a guitar between her and the audience.

At the end of our time together, Jenn talks about hope. She shares the analogy of child tossing washed-up starfish back into the ocean, one at a time. When another child is critical of this act, saying that they’ll never save all of the starfish, the first child responds, “Yes, but I’m saving this one”. Being a part of the Transition movement has given Jenn hope for the future - which she clearly distinguishes from optimism - and believes that her efforts, in conjunction with the larger TG community efforts, will change their immediate world.

Jenn believes she has found her purpose - to continue to co-create and nurture Transition into existence, one day at a time. She reflects on the state of the world and it not being an easy place to be with the presence of anxiety, hatred, anger and sorrow. In this, she believes that our purpose as a core principle is to help one another. Jenn trusts that Transition has given her the
tools to do this every day. “I believe the key to finding happiness is to know that you are making a difference and you are helping people and they’re helping you. And somehow, we’ve created this framework in Guelph for that to happen … whatever happens, I can look back and say that I helped my community - I helped people to do something, to find some empowerment, and to bring their passions into the world and into being … and through that, I found myself. This is my purpose.”

Elise’s Story

Elise describes her journey into the ‘transitioned’ life to be a story of re-building, support, connection, and personal sustainability. Elise’s life has transformed from years of struggle into something to celebrate. Many moons ago, Elise was faced with the break-up of a long-term domestic partner, a one year old son to care for, losing a job, buying a house and and falling in love with someone new. Moving through these life challenges was a struggle for Elise, who felt on her own and overwhelmed with having to rebuild her life. Having left the corporate working world, Elise was also faced with feeling a deep calling to do meaningful work, but she felt lost in how to embody this while also supporting her family.

The house she purchased after her separation was “in shambles”, as it had been previously lived in by generations of university students. However, it did house backyard chickens, which sparked Elise’s interest in sustainable living and urban homesteading. Along with her commitment to re-building her life, Elise committed to remodelling her home and
turning it into the most energy-efficient house she could. Making steps like insulating the walls, installing new windows, and tending to her hens fuelled Elise’s fire for extending this change into other aspects of her life. She felt empowered as a newly single mom, and wanted to be very intentional about living a meaningful and environmentally conscious life. She asked herself, “how can I frame my decision to be more environmentally friendly? How do I want to re-build my life after this disaster? What else can I do in my life with the same kind of mindset?”

And with that, Elise heard about a backyard chicken workshop that was being held as part of The Resilience Festival in Guelph. The Resilience Festival is a Guelph-based festival to celebrate, connect, inspire, and teach about building resilient and environmentally sustainable communities. Elise is the type of person who jumps in whole heartedly. This was demonstrated through her involvement with The Resilience Festival. Not only did she attend the hen workshop, she decided to volunteer. It was through this particular event that she met the Transition Guelph community. She describes this moment as her grand ‘aha’ - meeting like-minded people for the first time and feeling like there was a whole world out there that she was just on the edge of and she deeply craved to learn more.

The chickens were her ‘gateway’ to Transition, and within a month, the Transition Guelph organization was looking for support in re-building their website. Elise came from a design background and her skills were well-suited for this volunteer position. She recalls this experience to be “all immersing, because you have to learn everything there is to learn about the client you’re working with”.

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After she executed this task, Elise was hired on to do communications with the organization. Her first few weeks as a paid employee for Transition Guelph were “eye-opening, exciting and very confusing”. She shares that it was challenging working for an organization that had completely taken power out of its structure. Elise had to un-learn and re-learn strategies for working in a community-based organization where volunteers are empowered to work on their own projects. Elise felt “thrown into the deep end” in understanding the “structure of an organization that has no structure and no formal leadership” while also keeping it afloat and effective. At times, Elise felt overwhelmed with the lack of leadership and structure. And, just as Elise had stepped into the role of Communications Officer, the two founders of Transition Guelph, Sally and Chris, stepped out of leadership positions to ensure succession and organizational sustainability of TG. By the time Elise was in the the thick of things, Transition Guelph truly was a leaderless organization.

Elise was pleased to know that her co-worker, Anneli, was an excellent source of support. The two would navigate their roles within the organization together, supporting and caring for each other along the way. Elise recalls at one point feeling so bogged down with the day-to-day tasks, such as e-mailing and computer work; “it was suddenly lunch time and you think, where is your day going? We’re not producing anything, we’re supporting everyone, and it’s not leading to anything tangible … we were both getting super burnt out and frustrated”. What Elise and Anneli were missing was a sense of accomplishment, participating in the results, and celebrating
the day-to-day successes. Eventually, Elise kept a journal to track her daily progress within the organization - what she did that day, who she met with, what was discussed, etc.

Elise’s experience with organizing the annual Resilience Festival was a thrilling opportunity that was the “perfect recipe for burnout”. There exists a constant struggle in the organization to solidify the core group of volunteers who pull the festival together yearly, while maintaining the well-being of those volunteers and not stretching anyone too thin. Elise finds balancing her work with Transition Guelph, specifically her work with organizing the Resilience Fest, to be challenging; “[T]here was no balance while I was organizing the festival - none at all”.

In the last months, Elise’s contract with Transition Guelph has come to a close. Although she still is present as a volunteer, she finds the fading out process to be unclear, both with establishing boundaries with the volunteers who rely on her, and also with herself and feeling like she’s just disappearing. “There’s a lot at stake when I’m not in balance with myself … my son, my sleep, my well-being…” Elise understands the importance of balance - placing boundaries on how involved she is at an organizational level, saying no, and spending more time with her family and on her hobbies. Living a more balanced life allows Elise to deeply reconnect with the true meaning of Transition and get back in touch with why she joined in the first place.
Elise persists in this movement, because for her, this is a lifestyle that stretches far beyond her day to day work with the organization. She is ignited by constantly meeting new people with whom she shares commonalities, and discovering a sense of place and a sense of purpose for her life. She notices that she has reaching impacts as well, both near and far. Her husband, for example, has expressed less interest in collecting ‘stuff’ and now they both share a common vision for owning rural property and indulging in a homesteading lifestyle. Her impacts stretch far as well, with her Facebook friends requesting more frequent updates with her advocacy work around Transition.

Transition has changed Elise’s life in “every possible way”. Flashback to the beginning of this story when she was jobless, a single mother, newly separated, lost. And now, Elise lives a rich life filled with family, a new husband, a strong community, re-skilled in the areas of homesteading, and a positive vision for the type of future she wants to create. She’s also fostered a type of inner awareness of listening to her instincts, trusting her life path, and sitting in the unknown.

In the past, Elise found that she didn’t have to the space to talk about the negative feelings of despair she had about the state of the world. Today, there are increasing opportunities to explore her inner workings and to process her emotions with the Inner Transition support groups, and Elise is now aware of these opportunities. Overall, being a part of Transition has been healing for her - she feels like she doesn’t carry the weight of the world on her shoulders anymore. She has made a new commitment - “I’m going to change my life and do what I need to
do in order to make self happy. Yes I think the world can change but I’m not going to wait for it to change to be happy anymore”.

**Regina’s Story**

Regina describes her call to action for environmental change to be when she was sixteen years old and decided that she wanted to save the world. She attended the University of Guelph to complete an undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies and decided to stay in the city after graduation to become rooted as a citizen and immerse herself as a local community member. She had always been involved in environmentalism, and felt lucky to be able to work at The University of Guelph in her field. In her spare time, Regina read works from great authors of environmentalism and other eco-scholars like Joanna Macy. In 2009, Macy gave a talk on ‘The Great Turning’ and Regina jumped at the opportunity to go see her.

Macy (a scholar of systems theory, Buddhism, and deep ecology) was an inspiration for Regina, who had an “aha” moment at one of Macy’s talks. Regina realized that she didn’t want to live in ‘hypocritical activism’, “like chaining myself to trees to prevent people from cutting them down while I use paper to take notes”. Regina craved to live her life in a meaningful way and take a solutions-approach to environmentalism, rather than tackle it with anger. Macy’s work on The Great Turning talks about a paradigm shift from the exploitive resource-dependant economy into a society that’s more centred around well-being, thriving, meaningful and resilient communities. This resonated for Regina because, for her, what’s really meaningful for building a
sustainable future is, “getting together, talking to our friends and neighbours, and sharing really good food”.

It was around the time of hearing Macy speak that Regina was also introduced to the concept of Transition, and she has been actively involved ever since. She recalls hearing about the movement from its founders, Chris and Sally, and the idea of it appealed to her immediately. She was attracted to its nature as being a positive, collaborative, solutions-oriented approach to environmentalism (as opposed to the traditional, more conventional approach to bringing about change). At the time, Regina was also learning about Community-Based Social Marketing and found that the Transition movement exemplified this framework and even stretched beyond it. She appreciated Transition’s approach to environmentalism as being inclusive, approachable, and future-facing.

Regina illustrates the Transition community as a friendly group with a knack for welcoming and supporting each other through the process. She discusses her own journey with mental health over the years and how the Transition community welcomed her with open arms and hearts wherever she was at in her journey. She recalls at times feeling like she didn't want to leave the house; feeling like she carried the weight of the world on her shoulders. One of the things that motivated her most was being able to attend Transition meetings in times like these;
“Everyone is just so nice! In Transition there is a really positive energy that exists … and it’s a safe space to come as you are and be open about your fears and hopes … no one laughs at you for having hope in the Transition movement.”

At one point in her life, depression “turned me into someone that said I can’t … I can’t do anything… and it was a frightening thing, it was so disempowering”. And today, being involved in Transition has shifted the lens with which Regina sees the world. She has learned to re-frame her thoughts to look at the world a new way. “Rather than just seeing all of the single-driver cars on the road, I can now see the cyclists and walkers … I can allow them into my focus and a lot of that is because of what Transition has taught me about focusing on the solutions … I acknowledge the bad that’s happening, but I choose to see the good now”.

There is also an inner struggle for Regina - sometimes she feels detached from the TG community with her personal choices for using conventional medications. Within Transition, there is a large inner movement toward alternative health care. Certain attitudes can be dismissive about conventional medications to treat depression, and Regina feels the isolating consequences of this. For Regina, her medications have been a very valuable tool that she can rely on. In this, Regina feels an internalized, personal conflict of values with the general framework of Transition.

Overall, Regina’s involvement in Transition continues to be relatively joyous and meaningful. There is a sense of satisfaction and excitement in finding a group of people who
were committed to “working through the pain of caring about the world and doing something about it”. She finds there still to be that excitement of finding a movement that wants to change the world in a good way.

Although there are many positives to working with TG, Regina is also occasionally frustrated with the organizational components of the movement given its nature as organic and process-oriented. Regina describes herself to be an ‘action-oriented’ person who can feel “bogged down with the process” - she would rather stop talking about how to do it and just do it. With this, also comes a feeling of urgency to do more things. Regina feels mildly frustrated when too much of TG’s focus is on certain projects, while there is a multitude of other projects that could also be completed. She also looks at the wider societal context and feels hopeless when so much internal change is happening but that change doesn’t translate in a wider context; “… why can’t we, as an entire city, have more positive change? Why are people still so blind to the state of the world?”

Today, Regina’s plate is very full and rich. She finds that her passion for protecting the environment is woven into the daily fabric of her life through school, work, volunteering and personal relationships. She is beginning a Master’s program in Community Psychology at the University of Guelph, researching specifically the psychology of change and sustainable behaviour. She’s enjoying working part-time for two not-for-profit organizations; one of which is the Transition Streets program through Emerge Guelph, and the other, school travel planning for Green Communities Canada. She’s also actively volunteering with The Green Party, Transition
Guelph and as the default tech person for Emerge Guelph, helping to transition the organization into the ‘Google apps for not-for-profits’ era. In addition to this, Regina also lives with her husband in Guelph and tries to maintain her personal relationships as best she can.

She attests that scheduling software plays a large role in how she is able to maintain her busy schedule and keep balance in her life. She feels like her life is a constant juggling act - “It’s my own need to want to help out somehow, and now that I’ve taken on so much it’s about drawing some boundaries and dealing with the flux between all of my different involvements … I’m just going with the flow”. Regina’s husband is not a part of the Transition Guelph organization, although they do embody Transition principles with their lifestyle choices. He is very supportive of her work and volunteer passions. And when her life feels like a whirlwind, she knows that she can come home to that “safe little island with him” and spend downtime together. This keeps her grounded.

Through all of the organizational struggles and striving for balance in her life, Regina continues her work with the Transition movement because it’s helped her feel anchored within the community. She feels that Transition embodies its own fundamental principle in how it functions as an organization - resilience. “If a project fails, it’s not like we’re going to shut down TG. We acknowledge that it didn’t work and then we find creative solutions and alternative ways of doing it. It’s flexible”.

Transition has been a safe and happy place for Regina. She has found her community, a sense of belonging, and meaning. She shares that within Transition, there is space for everyone’s ideas. “You don’t have all of the answers yourself, and that’s a really good thing! It reminds me to listen too - it’s the type of collaborative listening approach that is new to me but has taught me a lot.”

Today, Regina feels a growing sense of history within the organization. She has been involved since the early days and has taken part in deciding its structure, revising it and running it in a collaborative sense. She shares that there has been a total turnover in the organization since her began. Chris and Sally, the founders of TG, decided to take a step back from the organizational components of TG last year. This withdrawal has struck a chord with Regina, who wonders if her time to step back may also be approaching.

Laura’s Story

Laura’s involvement and interest in social justice and environmentalism was “a gradual process that was rooted in the sense that something was wrong with the world”. Laura grew up in the suburbs of Vancouver, and was part of a loving family who lived a fairly mainstream, consumeristic life. She recalls sitting with her friends in high school, contemplating the universe, feeling the vastness of the world, and intuitively knowing that something “really big” was going to happen in their lives. This understanding of the world drove her desire for higher education, and so she enrolled at The University of British Columbia for an undergraduate degree to complete the next chapter of her life.
Laura gained a very inter-disciplinary education after changing her major on multiple occasions and she eventually settled on Romantic Studies. She learned about Latin American politics, languages, culture and literature, and more specifically, had activist professors who brought a guerrilla and neoliberalist perspective to their teachings. Studying these topics, coupled with a minor in conservation biology, fed her hunger for understanding the world in a holistic way. Laura especially enjoyed learning about ecosystemic issues, and understanding how systems worked. She found that in her social science courses, environmentalism was often critiqued for its lack of encompassing social issues. Laura felt pulled to explore and understand how humans could work with the environment in a symbiotic relationship.

Her interest in the Transition movement sprouted while she was in a biology class in the last year of her undergraduate degree. She had never heard of the initiative before and it lit her up. The Transition movement, “made sense to me, in a world where so many things don’t make sense”. She noticed very early on that many of the teachings of Transition were within a similar framework to permaculture - in fact, to her understanding, the Transition movement is social permaculture. This is, essentially, an understanding that building resilient communities, much like re-building a resilient ecosystem, lives on the principles that interdependence is essential; change is constant; diversity brings resilience; and work is holistic.

After completing her undergraduate degree, Laura decided to further her studies at the University of Sweden to complete her Master’s degree. In her most recent academic life, Laura
has found a particular interest in understanding the relationship between the Transition
movement and social justice. Her Master’s thesis focused on this relationship, and she decided to
deepen her research by traveling to Guelph, Ontario and gain a nuanced understanding of the
Transition movement there, and also to be closer to her in-laws. She and her partner journeyed to
Guelph in August of 2014, and upon arrival, Laura set up an internship within Transition Guelph.

Her internship began in the late summer of 2014 with local farmer and entrepreneur, Paul
Wortman, and his start up business Many Rivers Permaculture. Her work, more specifically,
included ensuring a smooth start up process for the business, along with creating a community
asset map - a map of local community members and resources that could act as potential mentors
and collaborators for his permaculture-based youth camp. From early on in her internship, Laura
was mining rich data by gathering stories and drawing connections between potential community
partners for this project.

Laura felt like this was an excellent opportunity to integrate herself into the local Guelph
community, feeling like all of her ‘worlds’ and interests were being woven together. Laura had
been a participant in Transition initiatives held in Vancouver. In Guelph she would also attend
events, along with organize her own events (like one she completed in early 2015 on alternative
currencies), blending her ‘Transition world’, her school life, and her hobbies, all beautifully in
balance.
For Laura, Transition has given her a sense of hope. There was a time when she worked for a Canadian mining company as a translator - a summer job her father set her up with, as he also worked for the company. She learned of the destructive nature and implications of mining, both in social and environmental destruction. Through this job, along with her studies, Laura would feel a sense of hopelessness - was the world actually changing?

Her work with Transition, both in Vancouver and in Guelph, re-instilled that sense of hope that she had as an adolescent. For Laura, being part of a supportive and collaborative community grounded her and translated her hope into everyday actions to bring about change in a small way. Laura stresses the importance of personal empowerment and appreciating the Transition movement for allowing her to experience agency, feel in control of the projects she was working at, and play a small role in something big.

Laura describes her involvement in Transition as being transformative. She has opened her “eyes and ears to be receptive to the transformative power of stories, and those stories have shaped who [she] is today”. From hearing stories throughout the Transition network, to being able to share her story with others, Laura has been humbled, educated, inspired, and found her voice.

For Laura, a large shift occurred in her own understanding of shame and self-love - she has understood how challenging “keeping your ethics and values is but realizing like you’re still part of the problem as a consumer”. She finds comfort in following her gut instinct and knowing
that wronging and shaming herself for being part of a destructive system is not helpful, and being
critical and open-minded to the implications of her actions is a “big step in itself”. She feels that
being involved in Transition has given her “a home for things [she] was already thinking about
… a framework to understanding [her] world and what [she] experience[s] day to day”.

It’s also given her a sense of global community - she knows she can connect with like-
minded people whoever she goes; “there are people out there who are similar to me and have the
same values, and that gives me hope”. Laura has also gained a sense of inner awareness, and
connects it to a Buddhist perspective of observing the world, her thoughts, her actions and,
through feeling a sense of detachment to things, is able to re-connect with herself in a peaceful
way. Transition has also helped Laura with getting clear about her commitments in life and
letting go of “baggage” that no longer serves her. It has strengthened her relationship with her
partner and has made her reflect on who she wants to be in the world, and how the partnership
can move forward in a powerful way.

What sustains Laura’s involvement with Transition today is the constant opportunity to be
connected to nature and connected to community. Laura sees herself as a pilgrim, a constant
traveler. As this story is told, Laura is currently residing with her partner in Italy, where she is
learning about urban agriculture. She views Transition as more of lifestyle than a volunteer
opportunity, which allows her to stay involved in the movement in whichever country she finds
herself in on that leg of her journey.
CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS

Introduction

After each oral history was complete and the narratives written, I enthusiastically anticipated the feedback from each participant on their story. As discussed in the methodology section of this thesis, after each participant’s initial story was written, I sent it back to them as a form of data verification and to invite them to make any changes. Most changes were minor and had to do mostly with language. For the most part, the feedback I received was the participants’ reflections upon reading their own story.

Some of them were excited, enlivened, and almost shocked at their own story - “[I]’s so neat!” “Is that really me?” A sense of pride was evident; it was an opportunity for them to detach themselves from their story and read it as a member of the audience. Participants came into their own identity through telling and hearing their story, and it felt like they appreciated the opportunity to do so. During the interview, when I asked, How have you experienced yourself through Transition, most contributors needed a moment to process and sit with this question before responding. One participant commented on how refreshing it was to give a voice to an aspect of herself that she normally did not allow much air time.

Findings

Stories are a living entity. They live, they breathe, they change. As discussed in the literature review chapter of this thesis, Transition provides an opportunity for people to share
their stories and re-write their cultural narratives into something that is meaningful and empowering for them. Stories can be used as a tool - for the story teller, stories act as a vehicle for us to journey into a deeper understanding of ourselves and make meaning of our experiences; and for the listener, stories (in the context of social science research) can be used for illustrative purposes, and as a collaborative avenue for acquiring knowledge. When a multitude of stories are told within a certain context, in this case Transition, it allows the audience to gain a holistic understanding of the bigger picture, while also valuing and appreciating the individual components that make up the larger system.

In this study, eight stories were told, including the researcher’s story. It was relevant for my story to be included for two reasons. I too have a long-term involvement with Transition and my experience of Transition was transformative for me. This experience sparked my curiosity to understand other’s experiences of the movement and, hence, this study was conceived (on the basis of heuristic research). In the spirit of collaborative, community-based research, it was also important to include my story as one of the participants in order to dissolve the boundaries of traditional researcher-participant relationships and, instead, inspire collaborative research. As discussed in the Methodology chapter, participants were able to read their own stories and they were invited to make any revisions they saw fit. This processes was important to inspire collaborative research (through providing an opportunity to engage the participants in the sharing of their stories) and to ensure that each story was as accurate as possible.
Common Themes From Each Story

Of the eight stories, there were nine common themes that emerged from all. They included: i) life prior to entering Transition; ii) community and finding a sense of belonging; iii) connection and support; iv) Transition is all-consuming; v) burnout (not every participant experienced full burnout, but all experienced varying degrees); vi) discovering balance (both striving for it and finding tools for it); vii) Transition as an inner journey; viii) Transition is transformative - it inspires self-discovery and deepens self-awareness; and ix) Transition is a lifestyle. These themes appeared in roughly the same order within each of the stories, with each theme leading to the next. Each theme will now be highlighted and discussed.

Theme 1: Life Prior to Entering Transition

Each participant’s journey with Transition involved details about their “before-Transition” life. One contributor spoke of his involvement in sports and other school activities during his adolescence and how he briefly felt a sense of belonging and community, which ended when he finished high school. Another shared their experience with living in the wooded lands of Michigan, eager to live close to the elements and establish an intentional community with her neighbours. A different participant shared her experiences with raising a child as a single parent, and the challenges that accompanied this. She reminisced how she craved support and community in those times of difficulty.
Fully grasping the state of the world can lead to feelings of fear, anxiety, overwhelm and anger. Many individuals discussed their experiences with understanding the world as it is, and the emotional affects this has. One participant talked about her journey with mental health and recalls feeling the heaviness of the world resting on her - “Where I used to live, I would walk up Gordon Street hill all of the time for school and work. I used to count all of the cars and the single drivers … it was so discouraging … once I remember thinking, *can I see joy in anything? Are we ever going to change?*”

The common theme that these stories share is that each contributor discussed their lives prior to their involvement in Transition, and their desire to be a part of a meaningful community. They found that sharing their life prior to Transition was important in order to convey how and why they joined the Transition movement, and how they were shaped by their past. It is significant to explore the members’ “before-Transition” life to be able to fully understand their motivations for participation in the movement.

From exploring life prior to involvement in Transition, we can understand that each individual story has some sort of “tipping point” or key incident which catalyses involvement in the movement. Some key incidences include seeing an inspiring lecture; meeting a thought-leader in the movement; or craving to explore a deeper connection to community and nature. This is a theme that is further fleshed out in later sections of this thesis.
Theme 2: Community and Finding a Sense of Belonging

Once they became members of Transition Guelph, all of the participants discussed how this movement introduced them to a wider, warmer community which led to a sense of belonging. Prior to their involvement with Transition, most participants recalled “craving” to be surrounded by a larger community of like-minded people. The Transition principles of people care, earth care, fair share draw in people who share a common vision for the type of resilient future they want to create. The Transition Guelph (TG) community is connected through these principles and it gains vibrancy with every new member that joins. The emphasis on shared values is important - one participant describes their experience with the Transition community: “[T]here’s a sense of being with your people, your tribe … people who understand you and who hold the same values as important and safe”.

There was also an element of camaraderie or fellowship that was evoked in some participants upon their joining of the TG community. One participant had experienced ample struggle and loneliness many times in her life. Through developing her own support network and community within Transition, her experiences have shifted. “I’ve really found a sense of community … when I’m in a struggle, I have people who care about me and understand what it means to come together and help out”. For others, community looks more like a celebration; “…[W]hat’s really meaningful to me is getting together and talking with my friends while sharing really good food”. Through hearing participants’ stories, it is evident that the Transition community is nurturing, safe, open, and warm. Its members feel a strong sense of belonging and
some describe it as family. One participant captures her experience beautifully; “[M]y life is a lot richer and busier and getting connected with more amazing people is a huge part of that. I really treasure this life and I feel more embedded in a home community than ever in my life before”.

**Theme 3: Connection and Support**

One of the most common themes that emerged from all of the stories was participants’ experiences of connection and support within the Transition community. This group of people have set themselves up to be connected in their activities (for example, most workshops through Minga Skill-Building Hub are offered by community specialists for local residents), the members are connected online (through Newsletters, Facebook, and other social media platforms), they are connected to other community groups (like Emerge Guelph, Wellington Water Watchers, and The Council of Canadians) and they are connected through their support groups (like the Inner Transition support group).

Through this connection, deep networks of support have emerged, and some participants illustrate the experience of community support as empowering; “Transition has given me a really good social context because there are people that I just love sharing with and talking to. It’s very simple and quite beautiful. There’s a real empowerment to just being with people who know what you’re talking about”.
One participant talked about their experience with feeling supported by the Transition community and how her entire lifestyle has been shaped through the support of her TG friends. “What nurtured me was the community of people who all shared a common vision … now all of our food comes from the local community … we are part of a milk share, we grow food, we get vegetables from a local CSA in the winter time, we have a beef farmer that we work with … I realized that I have such a strong community around me and that we can all work together”.

In the spirit of sharing skills and working together, another participant discusses the importance of nurturing each other’s skills; “[T]he whole purpose of Transition is to re-skill, which happens through the sharing of skills and through the recognition that everyone has a gift to offer. This comes from us supporting each other to find and nurture that gift”.

The experience of living in Transition is founded in community connection, sharing a common vision, and supporting one another through the process of building a better future. It is evident that Transition has spurred a culture of support, connection, and hope in the Guelph context. As one contributor states, “Being able to place yourself in an environment where you’re supported and people see the world the same way that you do has helped me and has showed me that good things can happen even when so many bad things are happening”.
Theme 4: Transition is All-Consuming

This theme explicitly emerged in only three of the stories, but it emerged implicitly (based on the researcher’s interpretation) in all of them. There appeared to be a sort of tipping point between each participants’ involvement, which led to varying degrees of frustration and/or burnout. This tipping point occurred between the benchmarks of initial engagement and burnout, before the participant was able to gain a sense of balance. In the later themes, it is demonstrated that Transition eventually becomes a lifestyle, but before it does, most participants undergo a period where Transition seems all-consuming.

Perhaps heavy involvement is spurred by the initial excitement of Transition, both in its nature as being solutions-focused and celebratory. One participant left their full time employment in 2010 to be able to spend more energy working on Transition Guelph. Others also dove in whole heartedly, both in their involvement at an organizational level, and in their embodiment of the movement on a day to day basis.

Embracing the Transition movement 100% also has challenges. As one contributor reflects, “I was thrown into the deep end with learning about an organization and then also being responsible for keeping it afloat without understanding how it worked, being a leaderless organization and all”. And at times, there would be a few core people working to keep the organization alive, which also had its challenges. “It’s shared leadership; we’ve all taken on roles and there is shared responsibility … it’s consuming when there are so few people working on the
organizational components of the organization. Sometimes it feels daunting. Another member touches on this feeling of overwhelm as well; “… I became so heavily involved and felt a sense of so much to do with so little time to do it … there just wasn’t enough time, money and man power”.

**Theme 5: Burnout**

Feelings of frustration and burnout were common in most stories, again in varying degrees. Some feel as though they “skated to the edge of burnout” and caught a glimpse of what the full effect might entail, and others experienced it head-on. Some felt burnt out on more of an emotional level, others felt it financially (“… I felt burnt out in Transition in a financial sense … like I don’t know how I am going to make this lifestyle work, financially”) and some felt it so drastically that they had to shift their entire lifestyle.

Others felt burnt out by the organizational and facilitation techniques used within the Transition Guelph organization. The organizational culture in TG is process-oriented, discussion-based, open, fluid, and collaborative. In some members’ opinions, they stand behind these techniques whole-heartedly in theory, but find them cumbersome in practice which, in some instances, led to burn out - one contributor notes, “I feel burnt out with the facilitation

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1 It is important to note that there is an underlying contradiction present within Transition Guelph. From a theoretical perspective, Transition is classified as a “leaderless movement”, but its functionality on an organizational level in Guelph has required Transition Guelph to have leaders. However, both TG leaders have stepped back from the organization in recent months, and the challenge of TG’s survival now lies in whether or not they can truly function in a framework of shared leadership.
techniques that Transition uses - I love the idea of open dialogue in theory, but in practice it’s draining”.

Certain events that Transition hosts, such as the annual Resilience Festival in Guelph, take a lot of organizational effort with little people capacity. One contributor states, “I think the Resilience Festival is just the perfect environment for burnout because there’s a lot of work that goes into it. A lot of people in this movement are stretched really thin and some have to back out and that’s okay”. For some participants, they even felt a sense of burnout for not being able to enjoy the events themselves; “I struggle with the participant part of it because I don’t know that I ever really was one … I was always leading or organizing”\(^2\). Or in this member’s experience, “I think when you’re constantly supporting other people and not necessarily participating in the results, it just gets tiresome because there’s no celebration and it’s just day-to-day work”.

**Theme 6: Discovering Balance (Striving For It and Developing Tools For It)**

Most members felt an urgency to establish some sort of balance in their lives after their varying experiences with burnout in Transition. Some approach this balance in more of a practical way, through establishing certain tools they use to reach equilibrium, and others strive for balance on more of a theoretical level (they are cognitively aware that they are off-balance and understand the need for self-care, but still haven’t made practical steps in reaching steadiness).

\(^2\) Note the contradiction again; Transition is leaderless in theory according to the literature, but in practice, on-the-ground initiatives required members to step into a leadership role and make decisions.
One member approached balancing her life in a more pragmatic way; “I just started saying no. And today, I’ve set up my entire life to live in balance. I fundamentally believe in loving where you work and being paid for what you do”. And later, that same participant exemplifies balance by committing to “… setting up my life with the very foundation of not selling myself short. It’s taken a lot of time and energy, but now I lead my life through my philosophy”.

Another participant has learned to treat themselves gently, just as they would a co-worker: “[H]ow I find balance is sleeping well, managing my stress through my hobbies, and reminding myself every day that I’m doing the best I can”. A different contributor notes, “It’s also important to remind myself that on Saturday, I can take five hours and not do stressful [organizational] Transition work … I can put my phone down, turn off my computer and not even think about it and that’s okay. That’s something I’m wanting to do more, setting boundaries for myself”. For this participant, part of setting boundaries meant pulling back on her commitments to the Transition Guelph organization.

**Theme 7: Transition as an Inner Journey**

As noted by most members of this study, involvement in this movement can cause inner shifts to occur. Some participants spoke of their previous attitudes and assumptions about the world as “destructive” and/or “hopeless”. However, for many contributors, involvement in
Transition inspires a shift of how they view the world. For many, it is a hopeful movement; “It’s given me hope and I have found an antidote to despair … I don’t feel powerless anymore”, and for others, they find hope in the processes Transition embodies; “Transition has reminded me to listen and to know that there’s a space for everyone’s ideas. You don’t have to have all of the answers yourself - I find hope and strength in collaborating”.

Through their journeys of heavy involvement in TG, burn out, and reflection, some participants have discovered an inner strength, a topic which will be fleshed out in more detail in later sections of this research. In one participant’s story, it became clear that; “[T]he celebration component of Transition is such an integral part, but the suffering piece is also important too. I found that the major transition that happened for me was not necessarily what was happening on the outside, but how I was dealing with everything on the inside”. The acknowledgement of the suffering (both the suffering of the state of the world, and the suffering of goals not being met within the organization) was just as important to this individual as the celebration piece, which led to a more grounded and holistic understanding of self.

**Theme 8: Transition is Transformative - It Inspires Self-Discovery and Deepens Self-Awareness**

Through exploring and analyzing each participant’s story, the theme of transformation emerged in each one. As a researcher, I felt like this was the “meaty part” of each story. I found myself perking up every time this theme surfaced. There is something so beautiful in self-
discovery, and from a researcher’s perspective, it feels sacred to hear others’ stories of transformation.

The personal narrative process evokes the participant’s sense of personal or cultural identity - and through telling their story, it was evident that they gained a fundamental sense of self through their participation in the Transition movement; “[P]art of Transition for me is coming to a place where you’re happy in your relationship to yourself, because you are part of the larger system and community too”.

Others feel like their skill set has been heightened; “I’ve really come into myself as a mentor, as somebody who has something to offer to individuals, groups, and communities and there’s a sense of value that comes with that”. One participant feels like they have been fully transitioned in their skills of homesteading and permaculture and that these skills can be transferrable into the next chapter of their life; “What I’m working toward now is creating a children’s permaculture camp on the West coast that employs the principles of permaculture, Transition, and meaningful gameification⁴… I intend to use the practical permaculture skills that I’ve learned through TG to inform what I do there”.

One individual spoke of how Transition has helped her make sense of the world, and in that, it gave her a greater sense of self-awareness; “Transition has given me a framework - or a

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⁴ “Meaningful gamification is the use of gameful and playful layers to help a user find personal connections that motivate engagement with a specific context for long-term change”, (Nicholson, Forthcoming, pp.1).
home - for things that I was already thinking about and was able to deepen. It’s helped me to be able to make sense of what I am experiencing today”.

Through each of the stories, it is clear that Transition has a transformative nature to it - participants’ lives are changed through their involvement in this movement. One member captures this beautifully; “Transition has allowed me to take back my power and to have other people take back their power”.

**Theme 9: Transition is a Lifestyle**

The final conclusion made by most participants is that they feel ‘transitioned’, or in other words, they do not necessarily view Transition as just a non-for-profit organization that they volunteer with, but also as a set of principles which has been integrated into their day-to-day lives. Each participant seems to embody the true meaning of Transition (people care, earth care, and fair share). Five of the seven participants are now homesteaders; all participate in their local economies, some are involved in support networks, and many discussed how their mindset has shifted to view the world in a more hopeful way. The boundaries between Transition as a “job” and Transition as a “lifestyle” have dissolved. One participant talks about the similarities between her work and her volunteering; “[T]ransition is social permaculture and my business is social permaculture … it’s just so engrained in everything I do … my philosophies, the way I interact with people and the way I think about community is really all about creating resiliency and a place where people can flourish. Transition is at the core of my belief system and I live it
out every day”. Another talks about the transformative nature of Transition; “[O]nce you start living this way, it’s hard to step back. It’s kind of encompassed my life and that’s a really good thing”. And lastly, a member leaves a lasting impression of the movement; “[T]his is my life now, and it’s really fun!”
“The Four I’s: Development of Personal Resiliency Model”

Through exploring and grasping the experience of membership in Transition, it is apparent that each member has roughly endured the same process, although each experience is highly unique to the individual. I have created a set of steps based on the analyzed data (coined “The Four I’s: Development of Personal Resiliency Model”) that roughly captures each participants’ experience of Transition. The “Four I’s” were derived from the research findings and can be used as a valuable tool in helping to understand the larger process that members of Transition undergo. The “Four I’s” provide a nuanced understanding of the change processes participants experienced in this research study. This model accounts for the stages of change, and also speaks to their inter-relatedness and fluidity in moving from one stage to another.

Through exploration of the data, the theme of transformational change has emerged. Each member undergoes a journey in their experience of Transition - some journeys begin in childhood, others in adolescence, and some in adulthood. Through the data analysis process, it became more and more clear that the data all followed relatively the same pattern; each story began with some sort of motivation or insight which spurred the individual into involvement of the Transition movement. Then, it seemed as though each participant experienced varying ‘outer’ impacts through their involvement in Transition (such as learning new skills, changing their community, or experiencing burnout). Following these outer impacts, inner changes then started
to occur (a heightened sense of self, a deeper understanding of the bigger picture). Lastly, toward the end of each story, most member’s shared how they envisioned their future engagement with Transition (for many, Transition became a lifestyle rather than a volunteer position).

The data spoke for itself and I merely created the sub-headings and themes it was coded under. As touched on above, four key steps in each journey emerged, which I have coined “The Four I’s”: Inspiration (the participant’s inspiration or motivation for their initial involvement in Transition); Impacts (the outer impacts that a member’s involvement causes them to experience); Inner Journey (each contributor experiences some sort of inner journey, awakening, or transformation through their involvement in Transition); and Individual Future Engagement (which is varying for each participant, depending on how their envision their future). This model also includes three “sub-steps”; the sub-step of action occurs after Inspiration; the sub-step of burnout occurs after Impacts; and the sub-step of balance occurs after Inner Journey.

Although each member’s experience can be synthesized into roughly the same process, each story is still beautifully unique. From a research perspective, it was challenging to organize an organic and highly distinctive journey into a systematic process - in other words, it felt wrong to take someone’s story and attempt to call it anything other than their unique path. But, as was stated earlier, the data was emergent and spoke for itself. The “Four I’s” is my attempt at capturing and understanding the larger processes of change that each member experiences through their involvement in the Transition movement.
A comprehensive explanation of this process can be seen below in Table 1. This model should be read from the bottom up (to exemplify Transition’s nature as growth from the bottom up), and it is important to note how each stage leads to the next, hence the incorporation of a venn diagram structure. The arrows are present to demonstrate the flow from one stage to the next. The image of a tree is placed behind to enhance the notion that ‘Development of Personal Resiliency’, much like the Transition movement, is deep-rooted, far-reaching, and once existed as a tiny seedling.

Each participant in this study experienced roughly the same process, including (but not limited to) the “Four I’s”: Inspiration, (action), Impacts, (burnout), Inner Journey, (balance), and Individual Future Engagement. Individuals have an inspiration for joining the movement which spurs them into action. Their action and heavy involvement in Transition causes them to experience different impacts, one of which is burnout. This causes the participant to look within and expedite on an inner journey where they internalize the teachings from Transition. From this process, they establish balance, or a new equilibrium, which nurtures their individual future engagement with Transition. It is within each of the steps that a colourful array of experiences are captured. Please see below for the “4 I’s: Development of Personal Resiliency Model”.

Table 1 The “Four I’s”: Development of Personal Resiliency Model
The “Four I’s” - Inspiration

Step 1, participants’ inspiration or motivation to join the movement, captured everything from certain individuals that inspired them, to how they were raised in childhood. For some individuals, it was a strong sense of “something is wrong in the world”, coupled with seeing an inspiring speaker (like Joanna Macy and her works on The Great Turning) that motivated them to take action. For others, it was that a strong connection to nature was fostered in their childhood, and witnessing the degradation of the environment was enough to inspire involvement in Transition. For many participants who had an activist background and were reluctant to get involved in “just another angry environmental movement”, it was Transition’s nature as being fun, celebratory, grassroots, actions-based, and accessible that inspired their commitment. Some, who came into the Transition movement in Guelph after it was already established, felt inspired by the Resilience Festival and how hands-on and community-led this initiative was. Others felt drawn in by the similarities that Transition shared with permaculture; after all, Transition is permaculture in a social setting. As you can see, the reasons for initial involvement are vast, and they can all be categorized into an inspirational moment or tipping point that spurred their commitment.

Sub-Step: Action

The step that occurs next is action. Participants’ inspiration for joining the movement spurs them into to take action and become involved in Transition initiatives. For some, action
came in the form of starting their own Transition initiative, for others it was embodied as helping to organize community events, and for one contributor, it meant working with the organization on a full-time basis. This step is very practical. It is important to take note of because it exemplifies the commitment of the individual to the movement in their own way.

The “Four I’s” - Impacts

Step 2, the impacts associated with being involved in Transition also fluctuated heavily. Two participants defined it as an un-learning and a re-learning of their entire belief system and how they existed in the world. Some impacts were concrete, like learning how to raise backyard chickens, how to grow food, or how to facilitate a workshop, and others were more abstract, like being able to understand the bigger picture, building healthy relationships, and “feeling alive”.

Almost all of the participants spoke to some sort of change relating to community and sense of place. Some described it as “building community”, “gaining a sense of connectedness”, or “finding a sense of belonging”. Others spoke of it as “Transition community support” or “discovering a meaningful life through community”. In whatever words it is stated, it is clear that involvement in the Transition community has made lasting impacts on its members.

Another impact that was covered in varying ways by most participants was the impact of burnout. As discussed in the “Common Themes of Each Story”, burnout appeared in most people’s experiences in varying degrees. Burnout through involvement with the organization also
catalyzed other impacts including, “learning how to set boundaries”, “feeling empowered through finding balance”, and “gaining tools for well-being”. Along with these, participants also talked about the impacts of their involvement as having “softened” them, or made them more compassionate, trusting, and collaborative.

**Sub-Step: Burnout**

This step was experienced by all of the contributors of this study, in varying degrees. As discussed in the ‘burnout’ theme earlier in the Findings Chapter, all participants experienced varying levels of burnout through their involvement in Transition. One participant felt as though she “skated to the edge of burnout”. Although she did not experience complete burnout, she felt irritable, unbalanced, and under-slept. A different contributor experienced burnout fully which manifested deep negative effects like exhaustion, degradation of personal relationships, and “loosing touch” with herself. She spoke of how long it took to recover and reach equilibrium again after she experienced this; “I didn’t understand how long it would take to bounce back from something like this … it took a whole lifestyle shift and it took time”. It is important to note that participants’ mental/physical collapse in this context refers to burnout through their practical, organizational involvement in Transition Guelph (organizing events, writing newsletters, or attending meetings, for example).
The “Four I’s” - Inner Journey

Step 3, Transition as an inner journey, spoke to members’ internal voyage and the inner transformational changes they experienced through their involvement. This was a profound and integral element of each story. The only term that comes to mind to be able to capture the entirety of each experience is a ‘reconstruction of self’.

The inner changes that each individual experiences were vast. Some talked about how their inner journey involved a ‘letting-go’ process, developing new values, and how Transition has fostered the ability to “follow your gut instincts” and “surrender to the process”. Others spoke of their inner expeditions as a process of coming into themselves, gaining self-acceptance, and reflection. One participant spoke about acknowledging the suffering of the world and how this made him feel vulnerable, but giving voice to the suffering opened space for other emotions to occur, and this caused him to experience a deeper sense of self. Another individual shared that they felt newly empowered and felt a sense of “getting [their] power back” which sparked an inner resilience in them. Some purely just felt like they discovered skills and talents (like mentoring, public speaking, or facilitating) that they never knew they had, and this made them feel valuable and powerful.

The fascinating aspect for me, as a researcher, was that many participants exclaimed how they had never really thought about the transformational nature of Transition until our interview,
although each person lit up when they had a chance to share it. Some commented about how reflecting on their own journey was therapeutic for them, in a sense, and how they appreciated the opportunity to venture into this undiscovered territory.

Sub-Step: Balance

All of the contributors to this study spoke about re-gaining balance. Some had reached the point where they made tangible steps in establishing and maintaining balance (through a drastic change of lifestyle like stepping back from Transition Guelph or leaving their employment to start a business). Others were aware that they needed to re-gain balance but they did not have the tools or the time to allow them to do so. Two participants landed somewhere between; they were aware of overloading themselves and feeling burnt out, and they had developed tools for relaxation (yoga, weaving, spending time with their pets), but still did not feel like they had enough time to fully relax. This step is a crucial one in the Development of Personal Resiliency, because it acknowledges the hard work and commitment while also emphasizing the importance of self-care and taking time to re-charge.

The “Four I’s” - Individual Future Engagement

Step 4, how each participant envisions their individual future engagement, was the final step in each story. Some saw themselves delving into more self-discovery through mentorship, advocacy, teaching about Transition, and in one participant’s words, “being a voice to the
voiceless”. Some envisioned future engagement to be taking future steps away from the organizational life of Transition, and stepping into a sustainable life of homesteading. The commonality between every participant and how they envision their future engagement was that, to each of them, they felt “transitioned”- for them, Transition was no longer solely an organization they worked with, but they had embodied the teachings of this movement whole heartedly and lived it every day. Transition is a lifestyle for these members, who feel less responsible for running the organization, and more responsible for creating and living the type of resilient future they have envisioned.

The “4 I’s: Development of Personal Resiliency Model” is essentially capturing how personal resiliency is developed through a process of engagement that started with an inspiration to join Transition. “Developing Personal Resiliency” was an emergent finding of this study, and this discovery could not have been made until the end. This realization initially hit me while sitting in my advisor’s office - I recall trying to make sense of all of the data buzzing around in my head, when I blurted out, “Transition is about resiliency!” Yes, of course Transition is about resiliency. But what I was aware of in that moment was the concept of an individual unconsciously, or intuitively, building their inner resiliency through their participation in a movement that was for building outer resiliency. In other words, participants joined Transition Guelph to focus on solutions to co-create a sustainable world (environmentally, economically, and socially). What I found most fascinating was that, in doing exactly this, each participant also underwent their own change process, which eventually led them to build their own capacities to
‘bounce back’ - their biggest transformation was understanding the importance of balance and through this, they developed their own inner resiliency.

Participants developing their inner resiliency was evident with one contributor, who last year decided to step away from Transition Guelph to re-charge her ‘batteries’ and re-define how she wants to live her life. Today she experiences bountiful energy to nourish and support a flourishing business, care for her new son, and continue to homestead with her husband. She has learned how to set boundaries professionally and with her voluntary involvement in TG and she has set up her life today to live in balance where she can spend equal energy on her family, her career, and her community. Another participant has developed an inner strength and resiliency through her experiences with Transition. From her experiences of exhaustion within TG, she made steps to withdraw from the organization. Today, her day-to-day life involves caring for her chickens, reading, and she has a new-found desire to mentor others through their journey in Transition. Her time of quiet and reflection has deepened her passion for supporting and nurturing others.

**Recommendations: Tools for Capacity Development**

There are opportunities to use this model as a tool for capacity development within Transition Guelph, and perhaps in a larger Transition context (further research would need to be completed before generalizing this model). The “Development of Personal Resiliency Model” can be used to understand the experience of membership in Transition Guelph, and could be used
as a tool to implement programming and support initiatives at each “leverage point”\(^4\). Leverage points in the “Development of Personal Resiliency Model” lie in the sub-stages of *action, burnout, and balance*. If small shifts can be made at these leverage points it could positively enhance the experience of membership in Transition Guelph.

For example, there could be opportunities for mentorship programs to exist within the organization so that knowledge and wisdom of ‘lived’ experiences can stay within the system and inform further generations of TG participants. A program of this nature might involve newcomers to the organization to be paired with experienced members, who support them on their own journey of Transition and who offer strength, encouragement and advice. This could develop capacities within individuals, and also at an organizational level to ensure the longevity and succession of Transition Guelph.

Additionally, if we now know one of the impacts that participants experience through their work in TG is burnout, then certain programming or support groups can exist at that leverage point to minimize the negative effects of overload. Bringing attention to the issue of burnout, and further, adding additional support for people suffering from it, could potentially minimize the experiences of it within the organization while also developing the capacities of its members.

\(^4\) The term “leverage point” refers to a point within a complex system (in this case, Transition Guelph) where a small shift can have larger effects on the larger system (Meadows, 1996).
Further Research Questions

This research study has explored the research question, *what is the experience of membership in Transition*. Through exploration of this phenomenon, additional research questions have sprouted and exploring these questions could inform a greater understanding of the Transition movement. One set of questions involves context. How much does context influence experience? Is there something unique to the Transition Guelph experience, or is the experience of transformative change transferrable to other Transition initiative? Can “The 4 I’s: Development of Personal Resiliency Model” used to understand other contexts?

Another avenue for exploration could be around burnout. What allows and causes individuals to burn out in Transition when the movement supports principles of no-harm, sustainable growth, and equity? Additionally, there are contradictions in principles of Transition and how it functions at on organizational level on the ground. The largest contradiction I discovered lay in the principle of Transition being a leaderless movement. It is presented in the literature and even talked about in communities as being a “leaderless organization”, meaning, it is built from the ground up, for the people, by the people. So, is a leaderless organization possible? If so, where and how has it been done? What allows a Transition initiative to have leaders at a local level when the principles of the movement define it as “leaderless”? Exploring these questions could provide nuances and a deeper understanding of the Transition phenomenon.
Conclusions

This study strives to understand the phenomenology of membership in Transition and transformational change in general. In summary, this research has discovered that: i) each experience of the Transition movement is unique to the individual and cannot be standardized, although there are common themes that emerged from each story; ii) each participant in this study unintentionally gained a deeper inner resiliency and ability to ‘bounce back’ after upset through their involvement in Transition; and finally, iii) this study produced a model of personal resiliency (“The Four I’s: Development of Personal Resiliency Model”) which can be used as a more comprehensive model to understand the experience of membership in Transition, and more generally, can be used to understand, capture and illustrate a human experience. This model can also be used by Transition Guelph as a tool for individual and organizational capacity development through creating context-specific programming at various leverage points to minimize the experiences of burnout and to maximize human connectedness within the organization.

This research contributes to the wider body of knowledge surrounding the Transition movement. The literature review of this thesis described many of the aspects of the Transition movement, but little information existed on the individual experience of Transition and its transformative nature. The concept of building inner capacities to ‘bounce back’ after upset is not explored in Transition literature. This research has discovered that being involved in Transition, most of all, is an opportunity for participant’s to gain appreciation of slowness, balance, and self-
care; and through that, building a greater inner resiliency to respond to the outer shifts and upsets they may be experiencing in the world.
EPILOGUE

Reflecting back now, I am also very aware that I underwent my own transformational change as a researcher and built inner resiliency through my entire research and graduate school journey. Through fulfilling steps of heavy involvement, burnout, and gaining a nuanced sense of self, I have learned to build my own capacities in being resilient through my studies. I have gained a deep appreciation for the process (the journey felt like a long, meandering road but I could not have landed in more appropriate place today), I have learned the importance of reflection and self-love (taking time to contemplate the journey inspires a meditative and loving state in me), and I have built lasting relationships (both with my research contributors, my peers, and my mentors). I have developed an inner strength and empowerment - knowing what I know now about trusting the process and being in balance, I feel confident to move in the direction of my dreams with a strong, open heart.

There is one last component to this thesis: the community engagement piece. The creation of a short film was inspired by a desire to give back to the Transition Guelph community. Their generosity and contributions to this research were enormous and I aspired to return the favour through creating a piece of promotional material that could be used for TG in years to come. Through discussion with key members of Transition Guelph, a promotional documentary-style film was requested to be made and used as a community-engagement piece. In collaboration with a friend of mine, we created, directed and produced a film on Transition Guelph. This short, informational film follows key members of Transition Guelph, captures the
energy of the TG community and events, and informs/provides opportunities for the public to be involved with the organization. The film is posted on the Transition Guelph website (www.transitionguelph.org) as a promotional piece and is occasionally used in social media campaigns. The video can also be viewed on Youtube at the following link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hV39aY27mfo
Bibliography


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Appendix

Figure 1. Interview Contact E-mail

Hi (insert participant’s name)!

As I've mentioned to you before, I am conducting my thesis research on Transition Guelph. Much research has been conveyed on Transition itself (what it is and how it came about), but little information is known on the individual experiences of Transition and its transformative nature. In an exploratory way and with the use of narratives, I am trying to understand local members’ experiences and stories of what it's like to be a member of TG.

I am wondering if you would be open to letting me interview you for this research as your experience in and knowledge of Transition would be very informative to the study!

The interview will take between 30 minutes and 1 hour and can be held at a location most convenient to you. All information you provide is completely confidential. My research proposal has been approved by The Ethics Board at The University of Guelph. Once your interview is complete and I have transcribed it, I will give it back to you as a form as data verification and to make sure I have captured your story as you wish it told. Finally, once my thesis is complete, you will be sent a copy of my final findings of this study.

If you have any questions or concerns, or would like to set up an interview time, please e-mail me at ksawatzk@uoguelph.ca. Your contribution and support with this research is greatly appreciated. If you're up for it, I look forward to starting this journey together!

Many thanks,
Katrin Sawatzky
Dear (Transition Guelph member),

I am conducting interviews as part of a research study to increase my understanding of member’s experiences within the Transition movement. As a member of Transition Guelph, you are in an ideal position to offer valuable firsthand information from your own perspective.

The interview will take between 30 minutes and one hour and is very informal. I am simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives on being a member of Transition. Your response to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and findings and could lead to greater public understanding of the experiences of Transition, and understanding the nature of the larger Transition movement.

If you are willing to participate, please suggest a day and time that suits you and I’ll do my best to be available. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Many thanks!

Katrin Sawatzky, B.A Honours, M.Sc. candidate Capacity Development & Extension, University of Guelph
Figure 3. Interview Guide

Semi-Structured Interview Questions/Oral History Guidelines

• Can you offer a brief story or description about your life here in Guelph?

• Can you describe how you came to participate in Transition Guelph and what motivated you to do so?

• What was your call to action (describe the exact moment or experience)?

• Can you describe what your initial engagement in TG was like?

• How did you feel?

• How would you describe your engagement today?

• How do you feel?

• What aspects of TG nurture you as a leader? What aspects nurture you as a follower?

• What does being a part of the TG community mean to you?

• What is it like?

• Do ever have moments of frustration, burn-out, or despair in your experiences with Transition?

• If so, could you explain what they were like, and how you felt?

• How do you balance TG with other aspects of your life (family, school, work, etc.)?

• Do you ever find this balance challenging?

• What inspires you to keep going in this movement/What sustains your involvement in this work?

• How has being involved in Transition changed your life?

• How do you experience yourself through Transition?
INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR M.SC THESIS

Date:

Study Title: “Stories of Change: a heuristic approach to understanding the experience of membership in the Transition Movement”

Researcher: Katrin Sawatzky, M.Sc. Candidate in Capacity Development & Extension, University of Guelph

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how members of Transition, and Transition Guelph more specifically, experience this movement on a day-to-day basis. The rationale for completing this study is to address the phenomenological aspects of the Transition movement, as little research has been done on this topic prior to this study. My hope is that the research conducted on TG and its members will derive a better understanding of this phenomenon, its implications in Guelph, and how members experience Transition and experience themselves through it.

What you will be asked to do in the research: By giving consent to participate in the research, you will be asked to complete an in-depth interview that will range between 30 minutes and one hour. You will be asked to share your experiences of being involved with Transition Guelph.

Risks and Discomforts: I do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

Benefits of the research and benefits to you: Your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and findings and could lead to greater public understanding of the experiences of Transition, and understanding the nature of the larger Transition movement.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions or choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence your relationship to me, the researcher, your involvement with
Transition Guelph, or the nature of your relationship to The University of Guelph either now, or in the future.

**Withdrawal from the study**: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating or to refuse to answer a particular question, will not affect your relationship with the researcher from The University of Guelph. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, all data generated as a consequence from your participation will be destroyed.

**Confidentiality**: All information your supply during the research will be held in confidence, and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear on any report or publication of the research. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only the researcher will have access to this information. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by the law.

**Questions about the research**: If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Katrin Sawatzky, M.Sc Candidate in Capacity Development & Extension at The University of Guelph, 50 Stone Road East, Guelph, ON, N1G2W1 and e-mail: ksawatzk@uoguelph.ca. This research has been reviewed and approved for complacence with research ethics protocols by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Guelph and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics Guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact Sandy Auld, Director, Research Ethics, University of Guelph, telephone: 519.824.4126 ext. 56606 or e-mail sauld@uoguelph.ca

**Legal Rights and Signatures**:

I _________________________________ (participant) consent to participate in “Stories of Change: a heuristic approach to understanding the experience of membership in the Transition Movement”, conducted by Katrin Sawatzky. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature (Participant) _________________________________ Date __________________

Signature (Researcher) _________________________________ Date __________________
Hi (insert participant’s name)!

Remember when you let me interview you for my thesis on Transition a few months ago? Well, I’ve taken the transcript from that interview and turned it into a story to be published in my thesis ... Your Story. I have used the content of our interview to shape the story, and have inserted specific quotations of yours to enhance it.

Your story will be part of a chapter in the thesis entitled 'Stories of Transition Guelph'. It will occur alongside the other participants' stories and your name will changed to an alias to ensure as much confidentiality as possible.

As a means of research co-creation and data verification, I’d love to extend the opportunity to you now to read through it and let me know what you think. If there is anything you would like me to add/take away, please let me know by Friday, July 10th at 5 PM.

Thank you so much for letting me hear your story and for participating in the research. I am in the final writing stages now, and am hoping to have the final copy submitted by September 10th.

If you'd like to be stay in touch regarding the results of this research, I'd be happy to share a copy of my thesis with you upon completion!

As the community outreach piece to my thesis, I also collaborated on making a promotional documentary for TG. You can view it here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hV39aY27mfo

Deepest gratitude for your big heart!
Chat soon,
Katrin
Figure 6.1 Data Analysis (Full Diagram)

Figure 6.2 Data Analysis (Partial Diagram)
Figure 6.3 Data Analysis (Partial Diagram)