ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: PRESSING HANDS TO CLAY: THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE ADVISOR AS POTTER

James Michael Limbaugh, Doctor of Philosophy, 2004

Dissertation Directed by: Dr. Francine H. Hultgren
Education Policy and Leadership

This study explores the experiences of seven academic advisors, including the author, in advising first-year college students 17-18 years of age.

Through the methodology of phenomenological inquiry, the author investigates personal experiences to uncover questions about the essence of first-year advising. To open the phenomenon more deeply, the metaphor of the advisor as potter, as one who works with clay, is woven throughout the text. The writings of three philosophers—Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Hans-Georg Gadamer—are explored to understand the existential aspects of

phenomenology and of the act of advising as a lived human experience.

A narrative based on individual conversations, written reflections, and group discussion provides insight into the advisors' experiences. Their stories and thoughts reveal the theme of care for first-year college students as the common denominator in each individual's commitment to advising.

The myth of *Cura*, the potter who creates a human from clay scooped from a riverbed, guides the exploration into the essence of the lived experience of advising first-year college students. *Cura*, engaged in the experiences borne of actually working in clay, embraces the complexities of advising in friendship, in knowingness, in reciprocity. The connection to *Cura* within each advisor resounds in resoluteness, transcendence, and potential for being. Ultimately, *Cura* reveals its essence in the advisors' joy in caring for students during a brief moment of formlessness, just as the potter rejoices in that instant when the clay is formless and without limit.

Recommendations for the profession of academic advising emphasize the priority of care. Professional standards should address caring as a fundamental construct, in addition to knowledge of policy and procedure. Individual advisors should understand fully the place of care in developing an advising relationship based on trust.

Additional study in the personal dynamics of advising within a diverse student population is recommended.

PRESSING HANDS TO CLAY: THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE ADVISOR AS POTTER

by

James M. Limbaugh

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Advisory Committee:
Dr. Francine Hultgren, Advisor and Chair
Dr. Barbara Bass
Dr. Sharon Fries-Britt
Dr. Marylu K. McEwen
Dr. Steven Selden

DEDICATION

To Tricia

Whose patience and positive thinking throughout this journey have made me love her even more

To Kevin, Andrew, and Jessica

Three amazing young people who I am fortunate enough to call my children

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I began crafting this dissertation, I knew that the task would demand a singleness of thought in order to maintain focus on the narrative and its content. I reasoned that my existence would be that of the solitary writer, spending innumerable hours refining my words and phrases in order to share what I had learned in my conversations with academic advisors. Now, as I put the "finishing touches" on my writing, I realize that I have never worked on this dissertation in solitude; rather, I have had the encouragement of a wide circle of individuals, whose support and counsel are the invisible threads that weave throughout these pages.

A heartfelt thanks is extended to Dr. Francine Hultgren, my dissertation advisor. Francine's gentle demeanor and firm hand provided the type of guidance that enabled me to soar beyond my own boundaries and to engage in a form of writing that I had never experienced. With Francine's support, I have been able to reveal fully the writing self within.

I am grateful for the support of Dr. Steven Selden, who contributed more to my achieving this milestone than he probably realizes, not only as a member of my dissertation committee, but also as my first advisor. For the past seven years, Steve has served as the "constant" in my education, offering the wisdom and advice of an educator committed to his profession and his students.

I extend my deepest appreciation to members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Barbara Bass, whose dissertation provided a model in phenomenological inquiry that I can only hope to emulate; Dr. Sharon Fries-Britt, whose insightful comments opened previously unconsidered arenas of exploration; and Dr. Marylu McEwen, whose probing questions pointed to a clearer, more distinct focus for my research.

Without the six individuals who shared freely their own experiences as advisors, this dissertation would not exist. I thank them for their honesty, their openness, and their enthusiasm. I am a better advisor myself for having shared in the opening of the phenomenon of advising with them.

I have always considered myself lucky to have spent over twenty years of my career at an institution like Frostburg State University. I now realize how fortunate I am. So many members of the University community—from faculty and administrators to housekeepers and grounds crew—showed genuine interest in my progress, sharing sincere words of congratulation at each stage I completed. To them all I say, "Thank you."

For their understanding, I am indebted to my three children—Kevin, Andrew, and Jessica. As I completed my coursework and embarked on my research and writing, Kevin and Andrew evolved from college students to professionals in their chosen fields, while

Jessica, seemingly overnight, metamorphosed from a little girl to a young woman.

Finally—while knowing fully that words can never adequately describe how I feel—I express my deepest appreciation to my wife, Tricia, for her unfailing support, her willingness to "cover" for me all those years when I had to study, and her innate ability to keep me on track when I lost sight of my objective. She understood, perhaps more than I did, how important achieving this goal was to me. In the face of this unconditional love, I am truly humbled and eternally grateful.

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CHAPTER ONE:

TURNING TOWARD THE PHENOMENON

Being Called to Advising

Advising first-year college students has been an integral part of my career in higher education for over twenty years. Even as I progressed from student affairs and business management to academic administration, I always have maintained a cadre of first-year students as advisees, all of whom have been in the traditional 17- to 18-year age range. I never really had questioned my motivations for continuing as an academic advisor to these students; rather, performing the function simply "felt right." In fact, if I were pressed to give a reason for advising in the face of increased administrative responsibilities, I could provide only a vague quasi-administrative response: "I think I need to keep in touch with our students" or "I want to know our students as more than numbers on a retention report." However, a chance encounter with a former student caused me to think seriously about the deeper meanings within the experience of academic advising.

On a wet, sleety Saturday afternoon in March, my wife and I were shopping for clothes at our local mall for our daughter, Jessica. As we passed the mall's center court, we encountered several Maryland naturalists recruiting volunteer rangers for a local state park. Tricia and Jessica stopped to ask questions about volunteer

opportunities, and I stood to the back of the crowd, idly watching passersby.

The words "Mr. Limbaugh, how are you?" brought me back to the present. I looked at the ranger-in-training standing next to me: Keith, one of my freshman students from five years ago.

"Keith, it's so good to see you!" I replied. Keith, a student whose persistence compensated for less-than-stellar academic skills, had struggled during his first several semesters, sliding into and out of academic probation. However, he pursued his degree with a dogged determination that ultimately led to his graduation. I had not talked to him since his graduation over a year ago.

Keith's uniform explained his presence at the mall: he was assisting with questions and inquiries about the volunteer program. As we talked, he offered the details of his life since graduating with a bachelor's degree in wildlife and fisheries management, one of our university's most demanding undergraduate programs. Now, he provided nature tours for park guests and visited local schools as a volunteer ranger, sharing with elementary school children his love of wildlife and his commitment to conservation.

"I'm in line to become a permanent ranger," he said proudly. "It's what I've wanted since I began school."

"I'm really glad things are going so well for you," I responded.

He paused, turning to look me fully eye-to-eye, and said, "I'm here because of you. I'll bet you never realized that."

"No, I didn't," I replied, rather stunned by his statement. "What did I do?"

He looked away, his eyes fixed on a point somewhere beyond the bustling shopping mall. "Do you remember the problems I had when I first arrived? How much I agonized over what to major in?"

I smiled. Yes, I did remember. He was in my office two or three times a week during his first year, recounting his struggles to fit in, his desire to excel academically, his need to make something of his life.

"Well, you told me something I've never forgotten," Keith said, turning to look at me. "You told me that I had to pursue what my gut told me, no matter what the obstacles were, because only then would I be happy with who I was and what I was doing."

I was silent for a few moments because I did, in fact, recall that particular conversation. He had been wrestling with the selection of a major, and had almost decided to "settle" for a degree that would have been one year shorter in curricular requirements and significantly less demanding in terms of academic rigor in comparison to the requirements for a fisheries and wildlife degree. I recall asking him, "But, Keith, is this the route you really want to take?"

"Yes, Keith," I replied. "I remember very clearly. You were in more turmoil than I had seen in a student in a long while."

"I did what I wanted," said Keith, turning to look at me again. "I received a degree in wildlife management. It was tougher than I ever thought, but now I'm doing exactly what I want, and I love every minute of it." He paused, smiled, and said, "Thank you."

I was stunned, honored, speechless. "I'm very glad for you, Keith." Our conversation ended on that note as my wife and daughter returned, the excitement obvious in their faces because of their plans to participate in volunteer training. I looked again at Keith, who smiled, shook my hand, and returned to the display table.

Was it serendipity or fate that drew Keith and me together on a blustery March afternoon at precisely the same time I was struggling with the selection of a dissertation topic? For several days afterward, I pondered my reaction to the encounter with Keith, considering the heretofore unknown value of a comment made in an otherwise forgotten advising session. As the weeks progressed, I found myself resurrecting memories of the dozens of college freshmen for whom I had served as first-year advisor over the past twenty years, curious as to where they were and what they might be doing. I wondered if any of our shared encounters had provided a similar insight of self, a flicker of resolve, or an impetus toward an important decision.

More significant, however, was the slow realization that my thoughts had moved beyond curiosity about my former students and into an arena of self previously ignored: Why was I continuing to advise? What inner force consistently led me to embrace a new cadre of freshmen advisees annually over a period of two decades? Advising provided no immediate indices of achievement, no "balance sheet" equations as were the norm in my administrative duties. What drove me—or any other advisor, for that matter—to serve as an advisor?

Ultimately, I realized the importance of my chance encounter with Keith. His story impressed upon me that advising first-year college students is a lived human experience, an encounter between two individuals that can reverberate with meaning. Van Manen (1990) asks, "What human experience do I feel called upon to make topical for my investigation?" (p. 41). In many respects, Keith has "repaid the compliment," for our conversation has beckoned me toward the exploration of a phenomenon that holds a particularly personal resonance: the lived experience of advising first-year college students.

Molding Clay, Molding Students

Does an advisor wish to mold and shape college students? Is this desire the purpose of advising? I consider these questions as I observe my wife, Tricia, at work on her potter's wheel. She bends over a revolving lump of clay, deftly shaping it with moist fingers,

developing a shape or form known only to her. The wheel stops, and she mutters an inaudible statement under her breath. "What's wrong?" I ask. "Oh, it's this clay," she responds. "Sometimes, no matter how hard I work, it seems as if it has a life of its own."

Was Tricia's remark borne of frustration, of not being in control of the outcome of her efforts? Perhaps it was a statement of respect, uttered in an understanding of the reciprocal nature of artist and medium. Consider the words of Susan Peterson, professional potter:

> The unique difficulty for the clay artist is that with this material, more than with any other, it is impossible to see the end at the beginning. In other media, you can see the paint or ink as it is laid down, you can look at the metal as you weld or the marble as you carve, and watch the work develop; it doesn't change and you always have an awareness of its look. Clay looks different in every state: fat and soft and wet in the plastic state, waxy and cheese-like when leather-hard, lighter in color and chalky in the bone-dry state. Bisqued clay changes again, in color, look, and feel, to something totally different, hard and harsh but usually porous. Liquid glaze that is applied to the bisque before firing a second time dries in minutes to a chalky skin of another color and quality, and when the piece is fired, behold, it still has another look! None of the beginning stages has looked or felt anything like the finished piece. The clayworker searches for the pre-visualization and waits until the end of the fire. (Peterson, 2000, pp. 14-15)

As I read Peterson's remarks, I was struck by the similarity of approach between the academic advisor and the potter. First-year college students present themselves as clay in its various stages, alternately malleable and rigid at the time of first encounter. Later, as the relationship develops, students may "soften," opening up new issues and concerns for discussion, or they may reject any further

entreaties on the advisor's part, much as bisqued clay prohibits any additional manipulation of its surface.

I wonder, too, if all advisors experience the type of joy felt by those potters who patiently "wait until the end of the fire" to see the results of the collaboration between advisor and student. Perhaps advisors find the possibility of not seeing the end at the beginning a maddening prospect, preferring to rely on established technique and policy, much as some potters limit their choice of media to only a few "tried and true" clays and glazes. Is it possible, too, that some advisors and potters both reject the concept of relinquishing control because of pre-visualizations based on their own personal visions, their own needs, their own agendas? What internal desires and demands drive advisors and potters to these opposite ends of a continuum…or to the infinite possibilities of approach between?

Ultimately, each potter's engagement with the clay is a personal journey that is built upon the potter's accumulated experiences and desires. The same may be said of the individual who serves as an academic advisor, for each advisor brings to the advising relationship an accumulation of unique life experiences that elicits a different reaction to each student. What draws a potter to work with clay as the chosen medium? What compels an individual to engage in advising first-year college students? What do these advisors experience in a one-on-one setting, purportedly providing advice to

17- and 18-year old men and women? As I considered these questions, I was drawn to the exploration of a fundamental question that I realized must be addressed before I continued any further in my investigation. Why am I engaged in advising?

"Seems Best to Me"

To answer the question, "Why am I engaged in advising?" I must first consider a core issue: What is advising? The word "advise" traces its lineage to the Latin phrase *mi est visum* ("seems best to me"), which is in turn derived from the Latin *ad* + *visum* (to see) (Barnhart, 1988, p. 16). As an advisor, then, am I "seeing" what "seems best"? On one hand, this question can be answered affirmatively when considering a formal definition of a college advisor. According to Crockett (in King, 2000), academic advising is

> a developmental process which assists students in the clarification of their life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of these goals. It is a decision-making process by which students realize their maximum educational potential through communication and information exchanges with an advisor; it is ongoing, multifaceted, and the responsibility of both students and advisor. The advisor serves as facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences through course and career planning and academic progress review, and an agent of referral to other campus agencies as necessary. (p. 289)

Am I engaged in these functions when I meet with a student? Do I assist, communicate, facilitate, coordinate and refer, as the process is described? Is advising an offering of a particular "educated" viewpoint? Frost (1991) states that "Freshmen identify advisors as

being among the most significant personal contacts they make" (p. 44). If contact with me as an advisor is so important, then what credentials do I—or should I—possess to be asked for advice? Why is advising considered important in the lives of college students?

The Technique of Authority

Advising a first-year student often can become the implementation of established techniques when a student's concern revolves around institutional policy or procedure. Even though "nothing can drown out new ideas as fast as an obsession with technique" ("Up Front," 2002, p. 24), both advisors and potters often find a safety zone in the parameters established by the procedure that dominates technique—a word that etymologically has a connection to the world of art, evolving from the Greek *tekhnikos*, meaning "art, skill, craft" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 1119). As a result, the dialogue between student and advisor that is predicated on technique imbues the "information exchange" aspect of the relationship with a recognition of authority, a position that

> is always connected with the idea that what authority states is not irrational and arbitrary, but can be seen, in principle, to be true. This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the expert. The prejudices that they implant are legitimized by the person himself. Their validity demands that one should be biased in favor of the person who presents them. (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 249)

What type of prejudices do I project in such a position of authority? Am I pre-judging (to refer to the root of "prejudice," the

Latin *praejudicium* [Barnhart, 1988, p. 832]), capitalizing on my students' legitimization of my position? Do I feel, as the advisor, a sense of empowerment, of safety, of control when working within the parameters of technique? Do I, then, advise because I enjoy being an "authority figure"?

According to van Manen (1990), "Every form of research and theorizing is shot through with values" (p. 43). This statement holds true for advising, for offering a response based on "what seems best to me" (to revisit the Latin root of "advise") is undeniably value-laden. In other words, my orientation as the advice-giver often drives the response to the student. What persona steps forward when I offer advice to students? Am I functioning in a dualistic sense—half advisor, half individual self? What, in fact, authorizes me to give advice? Do I carry a personal agenda in my dealings with students? What does it mean, and how do I feel, to have my advice rejected?

The Solitude of Experience

When asked by individuals not actively involved in higher education to describe my advising duties, often I will say, "I offer students opportunities to explore new learning experiences." Am I in a position to introduce students to experiences? My advising duties may be described best in a re-arrangement of emphasis: "I experience new students' explorations based on their unique needs." What, then, is an experience?

Gadamer (1960/1975) explains that "Experience, as a whole, is not a thing that anyone can be spared. Rather, experience . . . involves inevitably many disappointments of one's expectations and only thus is experience required" (p. 319). He further asserts:

> Everything that is experienced is experienced by oneself, and it is part of its meaning that it belongs to the unity of this self and thus contains an inalienable and irreplaceable relation to the whole of this one life. Thus its being is not exhausted in what can be said of it and in what can be grasped as its meaning . . . What we emphatically can experience thus means something unforgettable and irreplaceable that is inexhaustible in terms of the understanding and determination of its meaning. (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 61)

If experiences are solitary, as Gadamer suggests, then is my act of advising "something unforgettable and irreplaceable," a solitary experience in itself? Rilke (1934/1984) maintains that such solitude is a necessary component of human existence, but a feature that does not lend itself easily to interpersonal relationships:

> For ultimately, and precisely in the deepest and most important matters, we are unspeakably alone; and many things must happen, many things must go right, a whole constellation of events must be fulfilled, for one human being to successfully advise or help another. (p. 14)

If experiences are solitary, is the act of advising a blend of cumulative solitary experiences that lead to a final, unknown destination? My advising possibly could be part of a series of singular personal engagements, each an encounter of "unspeakable aloneness," encounters that merge ultimately with "the continuum of experiences present in the before and after to form the one flow of

experience" (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 216). Does my experience of advising first-year students fulfill a personal need that I may have to engage in one-on-one dialogues with college students?

Cutting, Shearing, Dividing

In academic advising, the verb "share" is often used to illustrate the giving-over between each individual involved in the exchange. The word "share" is derived from the Old English *scearu* (Barnhart, 1988, p. 993), and has an agricultural history in its original definition of "cutting, shearing, dividing." The professional lexicon of academic advising in higher education embraces the word share as a procedural verb for distribution of information or opinion: "I want to share my thoughts with you about your decision"; "Let me share some information with you about dismissal policies"; "I'll share your request for an excused absence with your professors."

Process issues, however, ignore the sharing of any uniquely personal characteristics. What part of me am I sharing in an advising relationship? Do I share my own human-ness in order to affect a student positively? Is my sharing, as an advisor, predicated on negative experiences that I want my students to avoid, or does it build upon my own positive experiences that I wish to relate? Palmer (1998) advocates the giving of self in order to facilitate the learning relationship with students: "My ability to connect with my students . . . depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I

know and trust my selfhood—and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning" (p. 10). How is the experience of advising affected, if and when I commit my selfhood to the process? I intuitively understand the value of personal commitment, a concept celebrated in the story of the woodcarver and the bell stand:

> Khing, the master carver, made a bell stand
> Of precious wood. When it was finished,
> All who saw it were astounded. They said it must be
> The work of spirits.
> The Prince of Lu said to the master carver:
> "What is your secret?"
>
> Khing replied: "I am only a workman:
> I have no secret. There is only this:
> When I began to think about the work you commanded
> I guarded my spirit, did not expend it
> On trifles, that were not to the point.
> I fasted in order to set
> My heart at rest.
> After three days fasting,
> I had forgotten gain and success.
> After five days
> I had forgotten praise or criticism.
> After seven days
> I had forgotten my body
> With all its limbs.
>
> "By this time the thought of your Highness
> And of the court had faded away.
> All that might distract me from the work
> Had vanished.
> I was collected in the single thought
> Of the bell stand.
>
> "Then I went into the forest
> To see the trees in their own natural state.
> When the right tree appeared before my eyes,
> The bell stand also appeared in it, clearly, beyond doubt.
> All I had to do was to put forth my hand and begin.
>
> "If I had not met this particular tree

There would have been
No bell stand at all.

"What happened?
My own collected thought
Encountered the hidden potential in the wood;
From this live encounter came the work
Which you ascribe to the spirits." (Merton, 1965, p. 110)

Do I have the true commitment of self to focus at a point beyond the "trifles" of procedure and policy, thus seeing the hidden potential in the students I advise? Whenever I experience a feeling of satisfaction in advising a student, have I truly shared myself in the forging of a person-to-person connection?

In their research on faculty mentoring, Kramer, Tanner, and Peterson (1995) offer an observation that applies to individuals serving as academic advisors: "Faculty should develop a caring attitude and personal regard for entering students. Long after students have forgotten the information and advice faculty have given them, they will remember the gift of self" (p. 64). Am I giving the gift of self when I advise?

Being Fully Present and Mindful of the Moment

As I continued reading books, journals, and articles to broaden my understanding of advising and its similarities to the process of clay-building, I chanced upon the story of a woman who had used her interest in working with clay as a therapeutic tool in her battle with cancer. In explaining the comfort she found in clay, she wrote, "The entire process of creating something from clay can be an opportunity

for healing of the body, the mind, and the soul. It allows us to be fully present and mindful of the moment" (Dennis, 2001, p. 8). For this individual, clay provided the avenue by which the creative process offered solace and the opportunity to "live in the moment." As an advisor, am I always "mindful of the moment" so that I might help the student to the best of my ability?

In writing the preceding paragraph, I am reminded of my encounter with Corey, who had appeared in my office without an appointment. His agitation was apparent, so I invited him in, asking him to close the door for privacy. Before he was even seated, Corey launched into an emotion-tinged diatribe about problems he was encountering as a member of a fraternity. Corey wanted the fraternity brothers to embrace organizational traditions of ceremony and dress; other members felt that an adherence to the fraternity's symbolism held no real value for them. As Corey stood and paced in front of my desk, describing in detail intra-fraternity crises centering on dues remittance, sorority mixers, and study hours, I stifled an inward smile. How clearly I remembered the importance of these issues to me when I was president of my fraternity, and how frivolous they seemed now. I was jolted back to the situation at hand when I realized that Corey was looking at me, asking, "Mr. Limbaugh? Did you hear my question? What should I do?"

Shaking off the memories of my own fraternity experiences, I made some suggestions related to organizational dynamics and institutional expectations regarding cumulative grade point requirements for fraternities. I asked questions based on experience—both as a fraternity member and as an advisor—to search for the real issue buried in the litany of travesties allegedly committed by Corey's fraternity brothers. Ultimately, I learned that the underlying issue was one of acceptance: Corey had been a loner in high school and hesitantly had joined a fraternity. Now that he was a member, he wanted the organization to adhere to his expectations, to meet his needs, to provide him a cadre of friends that he had never really had before.

As the advisor, what did I offer Corey in this encounter? Was I "fully present and mindful of the moment" in responding to Corey's problem? Did I give him the answers, the encouragement, the support that he seemed to need? I know that he was looking to me for assistance because of my own experiences in a fraternity. As a result, was I an advisor, or had I become a friend who had the ability to understand his distress?

Gadamer (1960/1975) writes that no distinction exists between friend and advisor:

> Both the person who asks for advice and the person giving it assume that the other is his friend. Only friends can advise each other or, to put it another way, only a piece of advice that is meant in a friendly way has meaning for the person advised.

> Once again we discover that the person with understanding does not know and judge as one who stands apart and unaffected; but rather, as one united by a specific bond with the other, he thinks with the other and undergoes the situation with him. (p. 288)

In my advising, how do I juxtapose the formal definition of advising against the advocacy of friendship as outlined by Gadamer? Is there room for both? I recall my feelings as the dialogue with Corey intensified: a distinct focus on attentive listening and an engagement in both an outer and an inner dialogue as I weighed Corey's statements and analyzed them internally. I realized that these issues were very important to Corey, and I sincerely wanted to help another individual in distress. I wanted to have the right words that would comfort him, that would break through the anger that was enveloping him, to help him understand ultimately that he had brought to the fraternity a need for friendship that he had refused to recognize. Why was this desire to help so important to me? Is there a part of my inner self that craves the role of helper?

The Sum of My Ancestry

Within the field of archaeology, there is a distinct specialization for those who study potsherds, the broken fragments of pottery created by early Native American civilizations. Texture, thickness, size, and color of potsherds vary so greatly that an intricate classification system has been devised. However, for those committed to the study of pottery, one axiom holds true: "In the Southwest,

where all pottery was hand-built, each pot contains human traces, is unique, and was made by an individual belonging to a tradition that is the sum of his or her own ancestry" (Peckham, 1990, p. vii).

Is it the "sum of my ancestry" that draws me to advising? Ever since my high school years, I can recall the pleasure I derived in simply talking to people. I was the 'big brother" who provided a listening ear to an assortment of other students. The tendency of others to share with me their personal issues, challenges, and fears continued in college through involvement in many on-campus activities and service as president of my fraternity. In fact, it was through my fraternity experiences that I found my life's vocation, that of higher education administration. My career decision led me to graduate school, and ultimately I earned a master's degree in counseling. I recall finding the coursework confirmation of an approach often taken intuitively when I "shared my shoulder" with my friends: empathic listening, reflective dialogue, clear focus on the individual.

In my search for a professional post after college I was drawn to the types of positions that required constant interaction with students. As a result, my first professional job was activities coordinator and advisor to several student organizations in a small Midwestern college. A daily stream of students in the organizations under my jurisdiction entered my office, often flopping down on the

old worn sofa under the window across from my desk, to discuss problems in their student organization or to bemoan their academic crises. As students grew more comfortable with me, the scope of topics considered acceptable for discussion expanded. Issues reserved only for trusted friends often found their way to my cramped office, shared behind closed doors and backed by my promise that "It won't go any farther." Admittedly, I initially was shocked at the intensity and depth of the issues students laid on my desk: pregnancies, legal entanglements, estrangement from parents. I listened to the details of each situation, attempting to stay focused on the individual without passing judgment, trying my best to remain objective.

Was I providing the type of listening ear these students needed at a crucial point in their lives? Were they able to face their personal demons as the result of a cathartic conversation held on an old sofa in a drafty office as Carly Simon warbled "You're So Vain" in the background? When I suggested to Dean, the young man who had struggled for years with his sexual orientation, that he tell his parents, did I help ease the pain or create additional stress? When I discussed with Barbara the various "pros and cons" about transferring to another institution, did I help calm her fears and give her the nudge she needed to step outside her hometown? For what type of answers were these students looking? Did I meet their needs

at that particular point in time? Did I truly listen to each of them, or was I trying to shape and form each student in the direction I felt best? These thoughts re-surfaced when I incorporated first-year academic advising into my next position at a small mid-Atlantic university.

The Unexpectedness of Clay and Advising

I realized early in my academic advising career that developing parameters for the tumultuous first-year experience of college students is akin to the efforts of beginning potters to control the entire process of ceramics. Just when a potter thinks that the outcome of a particular combination of form, clay, and glaze can be predicted, "Something else may happen; another ingredient slips into the clay, another phenomenon takes place in the fire, and the results might change a whole direction" (Peterson, 2000, p. 16). Every time I watch Tricia commit her pottery to the kiln, especially when she is experimenting with new clays or glazes, I recall the conversations I have had with students. As there is no prior knowledge of the outcome of the firing process, I soon learned that in advising there is no definitive answer, no prescribed approach, no "mantle of knowledge" that I can don in working with first-year students.

Yet, as potters are driven to continue committing their works to the vagaries of the fire, I also am compelled to continue advising first-year college students. What is the foundation of this desire? Perhaps

I am looking for a position of control, a statement of authority that Gadamer (1960/1975) describes as

> based ultimately, not on the subjection and abdication of reason, but on recognition and knowledge—knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence; i.e., it has priority over one's own. (p. 248)

I fully am aware of the position of authority that I occupy. Even the word "advisor" carries a historical connotation of accelerated, specialized, and in-demand knowledge: the President's advisor on national security, the King's advisor on affairs of state. In the case of an academic advisor at a college or university, the trappings of office, graduate degree, and accumulated knowledge of institutional policies, procedures, and majors handily can be packaged and distributed in doses of "what seems best to me" (to fade back to the literal meaning of the Latin root of "advise," *mi est visum*). This accumulation of external sanctions can solidify a position of particular influence when the inexperience of first-year college students is considered:

> Many first-year students, particularly those who are the first generation to attend college, enter an academic culture for which little has prepared them. Challenged and bewildered by the options the contemporary college offers, many first-year students are conscious primarily of their own academic inadequacies and of the extraordinary cost of erroneous choices. (Strommer, 1995, p. 27)

Is advising, then, a relationship in which the advisor functions from a specific power base? Does being "the one with the answers" fulfill my own personal need? Is this persona in contradiction with, or

compatible with, the advisor as friend? What happens when my perceptions of correct action are at odds with a student's desire?

Squeeze and Roll, Pinch, Hollow, and Pile

The process of advising is very subjective, shifting in breadth and depth with each student. As an advisor, I select from a repertoire of accumulated facts and perceptions to utilize the best items of information, consolation, congratulations, or inquiry that each situation demands. I experience a great deal of satisfaction when I provide advice that seems appropriate to the moment and a student looks at me in complete sincerity, saying, "Thanks, Mr. Limbaugh. That's exactly what I needed to know." What is the basis for my satisfaction? Do I advise to receive continued strokes for a perceived omnipotence? Is advising important to me because I can appear all-knowing, benevolent, and helpful? Do I desire to mold students into my perceptions of their future?

Richards (1962) writes of the malleable nature of clay and its comparison to the individual:

> You can do very many things with [clay], push it this way and pull that, squeeze and roll and attach and pinch and hollow and pile. But you can't do everything with it. You can go only so far, and then the clay resists. . . . And so it is with persons. You can do very many things with us: push us together and pull us apart and squeeze us and roll us flat, empty us out and fill us up. You can surround us with influences, but there comes a point when you can do no more. The person resists, in one way or another (if it is only by collapsing, like the clay). His own will becomes active. (p. 19)

What happens when I, as the advisor, perceive that a student is resisting my advice? I know that first-year students often do not actively seek the help of advisors; in fact, I may not be contacted until the student is in dire academic straits or until someone recognizes that there is a problem (Hart, 1995). Am I looking for the position of "having the answer," of "righting the wrongs" that the student has endured? How does it feel when I realize that the student no longer needs—or wants—assistance?

On Pots and Spirits

I am, as are all other advisors, a product of a personal history, a history that "does not belong to us, but we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live" (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 245). Do I understand myself in such a way? Is my personal understanding limited, or even appropriate to utilize in an advising arena? If, as Richards (1962) suggests, "our pots do bear our spirits into the world" (p. 25) does the pot, the vessel that is my humanity, bear a spirit of life, commitment, and self-understanding that can be of assistance to a student?

A "self-evident" understanding as described by Gadamer brings with it a peace with self, with personal decisions, with a life lived. Lila Krakowski (2003), a potter for almost fifty years, observes her life in

retrospect, the decisions she has made as she pursued a life in connection with clay. "Never will I build that underground kiln. Never will I master peach reduction glazes. Never will I go to Cornwall. I am who I am, a *fait accompli*, and content with it" (p. 116). Krakowski finds pleasure in knowing the act of clay-building has led to a life full of self-discovery.

For many advisors, the act of advising provides the same feeling of contentment that Krakowski describes. Yet, a life leading toward self-actualization was not the result of a seamless, trouble-free journey. As an advisor, what happens to my ability to advise if I am agitated and distracted by personal issues? Thich Nhat Hanh (in hooks, 1994) warns that "The practice of a healer, therapist, teacher, or any helping professional should be directed toward his or herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people" (p. 15). For me, advising is an integral part of my career and my daily routine. However, I am fully aware of the days in which I am dealing with my own personal issues: a concern I have about one of my children, a disagreement that flared with Tricia as I headed out the door to my office, the pressure of balancing work and doctoral studies. Do my inner crises betray themselves when a student appears at my door with another set of problems? Am I consciously aware of the effect that my own issues may have on my ability to advise first-year students?

Metamorphosis and Transformation

Richards (1962) recounts her continuing awe with the metamorphosis of clay, observing "how the pot, which was originally plastic, sets into dry clay, brittle and fragile, and then by being heated to a certain temperature hardens into stone. By natural law as it were, it takes its final form" (p. 20). Is advising part of my own ongoing personal metamorphosis as an individual? Does each student offer me the opportunity to engage in an experience of self-knowledge? The ceramicist Mikang Lim observes that her favorite part of the pottery process is the fire "and the way it transforms things" (in Mangus, 2001, p. 61). Is advising ultimately part of a personal transforming experience for me, much like that of the clay vessel in the fire? Gadamer (1960/1975) suggests the following:

> Transformation is not change, even a change that is especially far-reaching. A change always means that what is changed also remains the same and is held on to. However totally it may change, something changes in it. . . . But transformation means that something is suddenly and as a whole something else, that this other transformed thing that it has become is its true being, in comparison with its earlier being which is nothing. When we find someone transformed we mean precisely this, that he has become, as it were, another person. (p. 100)

Do I believe in a transformation such as Gadamer (1960/1975) cites, "that something is suddenly and as a whole something else" (p. 100)? I recall my transition to college, resolutely determined to create a new person, to move from the chubby "big brother" to a "big man on campus." I lost forty pounds, I immersed myself in college activities, I

was elected "Class Favorite." But was I transformed, or merely changed? Students still come to college with very intense personal agendas not drastically different from my own. For some, college represents an opportunity to engage in personal decision-making, to experience being responsible for only one individual. For others, college offers the potential to sweep away the person that was and to become the person that "should be." As an advisor, do I aid in the transformation these students may be seeking, while I push towards the completion of my own unfinished transformation? Or am I leading students toward something that is not achievable, that is based on my own inner conflicts as a young person, my own memories of being eighteen years old and a college freshman? Is this why I advise?

The Giftedness of the Individual

I know that students look to me in the truest form of my title: to give advice. Do I fully understand my human-ness—my talents and attributes, my shortcomings, my goals and unfinished agendas—and how they influence my approach to advising? Why do I feel that my particular combination of education, experiences, and opinions will be of value to a student in search of assistance?

My experience with Briana helped me to focus on the reasons I advise. A first-year student from southern Maryland, Briana had experienced particular turmoil over her selection of a major. She

loved music, but did not wish to pursue a major in music performance or instruction. On the other hand, she enjoyed business but categorized earning a degree in business administration as "a sentencing to a world of retail assistant managerships." After several hours, spread over multiple meetings, we arrived at a solution that excited Briana: she would pursue a degree in business administration with a minor in music management, thus allowing her to "have the best of both worlds." A few weeks later, I received the following note from Briana's mother:

> Dear Jim,
>
> Thanks a million times over for your ideas and your patience with my daughter. She feels so good about herself. You must really have a gift and a calling to be with our "aspiring adults." I feel very fortunate that you were in Briana's path.

The correspondence from Briana's mother struck a particular chord with me, not because of the compliment inferred, but because its message represents why I have chosen to continue advising first-year students. I advise, not because I occupy a place of authority or because I have in-depth knowledge of institutional policy, but because my curiosity about each new student I advise—about their abilities, their interests, and their unlimited potential—has never been fully assuaged, even after two decades of advising. Like the potter who "embarks on a journey of discovery, guided by the happy accident" (von Dassow, 2001, p. 2), my greatest pleasures often have come in minute doses, revealed in the small spark of realization I see in a

student's eye when, suddenly and without warning, the answer to a vexing problem becomes clear. I feel an unspoken warmth when a student like Jason stops by "just to say hello" and to let me know that, based on my recommendation, he had taken a chance on the unknown (participating in a study abroad program) and that it had reaped positive results. I look forward to each fall's crop of first-year students because of students like Charles, who had been academically dismissed after his freshman year, had worked two jobs for over a year, and had returned to graduate with honors, going on to a challenging position at a stock brokerage. I maintain my advising responsibilities because of success stories like Mindy, who had withdrawn from school after continued physical abuse by her boyfriend, but had called recently to say that she had re-enrolled in a local community college and was attending therapy sessions; or Sharon, who had teetered on the verge of dismissal for two years, but now glows with excitement as she tells me about her volunteer activities as a social work major.

Advising As a Reciprocal Act of Experience: My Entering Question

Advising keeps me in contact with students on a one-to-one basis, devoid of categorization, compilation, or other methods of aggregate student management. I find each student a fascinating mix of enthusiasm, fear, bravado, confusion—often all occurring at the

same time. This connection to students—to the true mission of the university—has maintained a personal grounding as my career provides opportunity for more complex administrative responsibilities.

The potter Eric Botbyl (2003) writes about his continuing re-connection with clay:

> I cherish those times in life when I find myself completely engulfed in an action, then something compels me to stop and take account of what I am doing. These times most often occur in the studio where I find myself up to my elbows in clay, shaking my head and thinking, "That's where that came from." It is during those moments that I slow down long enough to learn something about myself. I learn something about why I am making what I am, and that I am making because of who I am. (p. 43)

For me, my involvement with advising continues, as Botbyl continues his involvement with clay, because of who I am. Advising offers me the opportunity to make connections with students, to offer help, to create a "safe place" in the middle of their new world. Advising maintains a focus on students as individuals, allowing me to see them beyond names on a roster, providing a humanness that serves as a welcome counterpoint to my administrative duties.

The unity of a special bond, the opportunity to undergo experiences with students during a pivotal time of their lives—these reasons have compelled me to continue advising as an integral part of my profession as a university administrator. For me, my connection to students during their first year in college exposes the wholeness of

what the student might become, as the revolving clay beneath the potter's hand offers glimpses into its full potential:

> When we are working on the potter's wheel, we are touching the clay at only one point; and yet as the pot turns through our fingers, the whole is being affected, and we have an experience of this wholeness. (Richards, 1962, p. 24)

In many respects, I am the potter, hopefully impacting the student in a small way much as a potter's fingers can re-shape a vessel with the slightest pressure. Advising is a continuing journey of personal exploration as well, for I feel that each student propels me along a private sojourn with a meaning best described by O'Donohue (1997): "The human journey is a continuous act of transfiguration. If approached in friendship, the unknown, the anonymous, the negative, and the threatening gradually yield their secret affinity with us" (p. xvii). Is the unique experience of advising part of my personal transfiguration? Is my own sense of my humanity symbiotically connected to my advising? How do other advisors view their personal experiences in advising? These questions have paved the way for the query that drives my study: **What is the lived experience of advising first-year college students?** Such a question calls for the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Why Hermeneutical Phenomenology?

What inner voice compelled me to select the methodology of hermeneutical phenomenology? I had no experience, no background in philosophy; in fact, I had never even taken a philosophy course.

Why did the existential aspects of phenomenology interest me, rather than drive me away from its abstractness and toward a more conservative form of qualitative research?

"All Truths Wait In All Things"

I was introduced to phenomenology through a research course taken in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Having undergraduate degrees in both English and history, I was drawn to van Manen's (1990) description of phenomenological inquiry, that it is

> not unlike an artistic endeavor, a creative attempt to somehow capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive. (p. 39)

The opportunities for creation of a narrative that engaged my interests in literature, history, and education thus piqued my interest in phenomenology as an appropriate mode of inquiry.

The Significance of a Touch

As I continued my exploration, I realized that I had been introduced indirectly to phenomenology during my undergraduate studies. While pursuing a baccalaureate degree in English, an entire class was devoted to a discussion of Walt Whitman's (1973) "Song of Myself":

> All truths wait in all things,
> They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it,
> They do not need the obstetric forceps of the surgeon,
> The insignificant is as big to me as any,
> (What is less or more than a touch?) (p. 58)

Whitman asks, "What is less or more than a touch?" A touch is seemingly trivial, an action in an endless succession of movements in human life. Yet, van Manen (1990) emphasizes that the importance of understanding something as fleeting as a touch is, in fact, worthy of study for the level of understanding of human existence that it brings:

> Hermeneutic phenomenological research reintegrates part and whole, the contingent and the essential, value and desire. It encourages a certain attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial dimensions of our everyday lives. It makes us thoughtfully aware of the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken-for-granted. (p. 8)

The opportunity to discover the essence of an everyday experience had certainly piqued my interest. However, as I engaged in further exploration of the tenets of phenomenology, I struggled with the "data collection" phase. I was accustomed to literature reviews, surveys, experiments—the traditional forms of research. How was I to assimilate the type of "data" needed on which I could build a dissertation of this type?

The Fabric of the Body

"My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my comprehension" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 235). This observation, set forth in *Phenomenology and Perception*, further contributed to my growing interest in hermeneutic phenomenology as a research methodology. I was intrigued by the use of retrieved memory—memory of an event after its occurrence but before its

categorization—coupled with sensory recall to construct a narrative that illuminates an everyday phenomenon.

In addition, I was tantalized by the thought of immersing myself in a form of research new to me. Throughout my education, I had consistently used traditional methodologies that required the establishment of a thesis supported by research and relevant literature. However, all my investigative efforts had been based on topics separate from my own existence. For example, my research essay in a graduate history course on the G. I. Bill, a legislative measure that provided educational opportunities for World War II veterans, was written fully using the retrospective tools accorded the historian, because I was never a college student during the years 1946 to 1950. The opportunity to dig deeply into my own lived experience and to open the phenomenon by welcoming the reader to share in the lived moments of the experience was an intriguing concept.

The Philosophers' Circle

Readings in contemporary philosophy further reinforced my decision to select hermeneutic phenomenology as the avenue by which I would explore the experience of advising first-year students. Because phenomenology is the study of the essence of an experience, writes Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968), "All problems amount to finding definitions of essences" (p. vii). However, phenomenology

> also offers an account of space, time and the world as we 'live' them. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide. (p. vii)

Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) further maintains that the essence of an experience is best seen from a distance, when the event and all its implications can be viewed in their entirety. In effect, the phenomenological facets of an event are best understood when we bring ourselves ". . . wholly to the transparency of the imaginary, think it without the support of any ground, in short, withdraw to the bottom of nothingness. Only then could we know what moments positively make up the being of this experience" (p. 111). Phenomenology offers me the unique opportunity to explore the experiences of two decades' worth of advising, and to present the essence of these experiences and those of other advisors in a creative and compelling narrative.

Writing as the Instrument of Phenomenology

According to Gadamer (1960/1975), the tradition of hermeneutics is one of circular understanding: "We must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole" (p. 258). These thoughts mirror van Manen's (1990) premise that "Phenomenology attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld" (p. 11). Gadamer

(1960/1975) further maintains that all experiences are genuine as a focus of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Ultimately, my decision to use phenomenology as my research methodology was confirmed when I read Gadamer's (1960/1975) words in *Truth and Method* regarding the link between writing and the actual recording of the essence of an experience:

> [Thus] written texts present the real hermeneutical task. Writing involves self-alienation. Its overcoming, the reading of the text, is thus the highest task of understanding. (p. 352)
>
> In actual fact, writing is central to the hermeneutical phenomenon, insofar as its detachment both from the writer or author and from a specifically addressed recipient or reader has given it a life of its own. What is fixed in writing has raised itself publicly into a sphere of meaning in which everyone who can read has an equal share. (p. 353)

In phenomenology, I perceived the chance to draw on my interests in literature and history, to engage in a new form of research, and to craft a document that would, I hoped, fully engage the reader in understanding the experience of academic advising. This confluence of interests and methodology was ultimately the primary determinant in my decision.

Contributing the Unsayable

Hermeneutic phenomenology as a research methodology also offers a challenging opportunity to contribute to the existing body of literature on first-year advising. Rilke (1984) writes that "Things aren't all so tangible and sayable as people would usually have us believe; most experiences are unsayable, they happen in a space that

no word has ever entered" (p. 4). Is there, then, a facet of the advising experience that is yet unturned?

A review of existing literature on academic advising indicates that Rilke's observation is correct regarding any investigation into the advisor's actual experience in working with college students. Research has focused on such diverse topics as advising multicultural students (Brown & Rivas, 1995; Priest & McPhee, 2000), organizational models (Pardee, 2000), career planning (McCalla-Wriggins, 2000), assessment of advising effectiveness (Creamer & Scott, 2000; Lynch, 2000; Upcraft, Srebnik, & Stevenson, 1995), and retention (Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001). Annotated bibliographies compiled by Gordon (1994) and Steele (1995) include categories on advising special student populations, training and reward systems, legal issues, and advising as a profession. However, no advising research has yet been mounted that focuses on the actual experience of the advisor in the advising relationship. That phenomenology is "keenly interested in the significant world of the human being" (van Manen, 1990, p. 9) makes it a particularly appropriate methodology to explore the advising of college students, a phenomenon that is uniquely human in nature: **What is the lived experience of advising first-year college students?**

Kneading the Clay, Exploring the Phenomenon

As the potter continually kneads the clay to remove air bubbles, I will explore the phenomenon of first-year advising, working the clay of the experience in order to discover its essence, remembering van Manen's (1990) admonition that "It is to the extent that my experience could be our experience that the phenomenologist wants to be reflectively aware of certain meanings" (p. 57). The goal of my writing is to fulfill van Manen's (1990) description of phenomenological research:

> Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research. The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience. (p. 36)

To this end, I will be guided by van Manen's (1990) methodological structure, "a dynamic interplay among six research activities" (p. 30):

1. Having embraced hermeneutic phenomenology as my methodology, in this chapter I have *turned to the nature of the lived experience* of advising first-year college students as a phenomenon rich with human experience.
2. Because phenomenological research "aims at establishing a renewed contact with original experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 31), I *investigate the experience as I live it and as others*

live it, completing my research as I continue to advise first-year college students.

3. In Chapter Two, I *reflect on the essentiality of the phenomenon* through the metaphor of pottery—and the experience of creating an object of pottery. I delve deeper into the many facets of academic advising as an act of human engagement through my exploration of the lived experience of clay and my reactions and insights as the potter. This exploration continues as I engage my research participants in the meaning of their advising experiences with first-year students.
4. As I engage in the process of *writing and re-writing* in order to more fully illuminate the phenomenon, I introduce basic tenets of advising as reflected in contemporary research on the subject, presenting these fundamental themes from a phenomenological, experiential stance. Etymological derivations of words further illuminate the phenomenon, as do preliminary conversations with Jodie and Tim, two academic advisors with a combined experience of over 40 years advising students.
5. Chapter Three embraces the philosophical underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology as I explore the concepts of language, body, and understanding. My investigation into

the methodology of phenomenology and the pedagogical implications of my study provide the focus for a "*strong and oriented relation*" (van Manen, 1990, p. 33) to the phenomenon of advising first-year college students.

6. As I engage other advisors of first-year students in conversations regarding their lived experiences, I again will be reflecting on the essentiality of the phenomenon through the process of writing and re-writing as themes are brought forward. Ultimately, the *consideration of parts and whole*, as explored through the writing process, is the foundation for the remaining chapters, as I probe what these interpretations offer for a deeper understanding of the lived experience of advising, using the "data" collected through conversations with other advisors of first-year college students. A final chapter addresses what my discoveries mean for the practice of advising.

What, then, lies beneath the externality of advising first-year college students? My own insights into advising, as the result of the initial writing toward understanding that has unfolded in this chapter, has revealed to me shifting shapes, yet unseen, like the vessel that forms on the wheel, only to be lost on the next rotation. Gadamer (1960/1975) confirms my decision to embrace phenomenology in my search for the deeper meanings of the human-

to-human act of advising. He reminds me that the everydayness of such an encounter

> can be covered up so extensively that it becomes forgotten and no question arises about it or about its meaning. Thus that which demands that it become a phenomenon, and which demands this in a distinctive sense and in terms of its ownmost content as a thing, is what phenomenology has taken into its grasp thematically as its object. (p.59)

My research becomes the demand that probes the depths of the everydayness of advising, showing to the light an essence yet unseen. To explore the depths of meanings that I may find, I turn to the experience of clay-building to provide additional insights.

CHAPTER TWO:
THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

Putting Hands to Clay: Opening the Metaphor

As I slowly worked through the required courses of my doctoral program—usually two per semester, completed over a period of four and one half years—my wife, Tricia, was immersed in her own pilgrimage as she pursued a bachelor of fine arts degree with an emphasis in ceramics. Gradually, through daily dialogues with Tricia about her assignments and projects, I developed a rudimentary knowledge of the art, craft, and history of clay. I learned that working with clay was, in fact, "an art form that is as old as civilization itself" (Chappell, 1991, p. 18). I was introduced to multiple varieties of clay, each with its own purpose and firing temperature: ball clay, fire clay, stoneware clay, earthenware, and porcelain. I saw that combinations of glaze and finishing textures were limited only by the selection of chemicals used in combination with natural elements such as potassium, ash, copper, and manganese.

As my knowledge of clay as a medium for personal expression expanded, so too did my insight into the potter's pivotal role in the process of clay building. The potter is one of only a select few artists who can successfully straddle the worlds of aesthetic expression and functionality. On one hand, the potter manipulates the endless combinations of clay and glaze into objects whose primary function is

to entertain, excite, or challenge the viewer visually. Yet the potter can also focus on the creation of objects that serve a useful function in daily life, constructing vases, bowls, platters, and plates that become integral components of day-to-day existence.

Some potters enjoy the limitless opportunities of self-knowledge found in clay, observing that "The more time I spend . . . the more I learn" (Garriott-Stejskal, 2003, p. 35). The French potter Morvan, in speaking of a dream in which he achieved a perfect glaze after he threw himself into the kiln, emphasizes the importance of the potter committing the entire person to the process of creating beautiful work (Anders, 2003). Yet other potters understand that their choice of vocation could be construed as a calculated risk: "What we potters do is actually pretty far removed from most people's reality. . . only a fool would spend years learning how to work with clay to be rewarded with a career characterized by hard work, few job opportunities, little security, and low pay" (Hendley, 2003, p. 61).

The Value in Serendipity

No matter what reasons an individual embraces clay, a universal experience binds all practitioners: the reality that they have no control over the final outcome. While the potter may visualize a particular piece or design, the tacit understanding exists that a fundamental tenet of clay is its unplanned, unexpected character, a fact that leads Hennig (2001) to reflect that "In working with clay, I

have learned to welcome the surprises arising from a process beyond my control" (p. 48).

As a result, regardless of the personal vision attached to a particular piece, and in spite of the hours and days of work, each step in the process of creating ceramics is riddled with opportunities for success—and disappointment. With a failure to knead the clay properly, interior air pockets do not disperse completely, and the piece explodes in the kiln. When a glaze is poorly mixed, a puddle on the kiln floor is all that remains after the glaze congeals and sloughs away from the surface. If poor joining techniques are used, the beautiful three-foot pot that required hours of painstaking attention disintegrates in a matter of minutes because the clay components demand a seamless connection in order to coalesce effectively as a unit.

In reality, the process of building in pottery combines the potter's proficiency with equal doses of chemical interaction and luck. Often, the most successful pieces are those that are the result of an unintentional error: the pot that folded on the wheel, moving from its original iteration as a jar to a new life as a covered dish; the glazes carefully applied to complement each other, turning into an unexpected interplay of hues as a result of the firing process. As I learned more about the process of pottery, I understood that advising is often predicated on the same sort of serendipitous process: the

advisor as the potter with ready hands and a catalog of glazes, the student as the clay and its potential, and external influences as the uncontrolled predominance of the firing process.

In much the same manner that the successful execution of a ceramic object is distinguished ultimately by the talent of the potter, an advisor's abilities and skills contribute significantly to the success of academic advising. Research into academic advising has confirmed the importance of the advising relationship in a student's college experience; for example, "There is a wealth of important empirically-based research," according to Gardner and Kerr (1995), "which has found a significant correlation between quality advisement, student satisfaction, and enhanced persistence and graduation" (p. v).

But "quality academic advisement" is a value-laden term. What is the experience of the advisor in the delivery of "quality academic advisement"? Do all advisors exhibit the same characteristics or utilize the same base of knowledge in order to be engaged in a "quality experience"? "Quality" itself is a highly subjective concept, dependent exclusively on the accumulated characteristics, goals, and perceptions brought by the individual applying the term as a descriptor. Who, then, ultimately defines "quality academic advisement": the student, the advisor, or a set of external parameters?

Advising "By the Book"

The world of pottery has not escaped the phenomenon of "how-to" publications. A scan of any bookstore shelf or on-line catalog reveals an unlimited roster of topics; e.g., building pots by hand; developing unique chemical reactions in glazes; exploring Native American pottery techniques. However, a common theme runs through such books: the premise that a fundamental theory of pottery exists and that, if followed, allegedly will enable the potter to manage and manipulate the clay into the final form envisioned with the mind's eye.

The profession of advising also provides its own version of "how-to" manuals. For example, Upcraft and Gardner (1989), in specifying a set of advising benchmarks, delineate specific educational and personal goals that the advisor should strive to establish with each student:

1. Developing academic and intellectual competence;
2. Establishing and maintaining personal relationships;
3. Developing an identity;
4. Deciding on a career and lifestyle;
5. Maintaining health and personal fitness;
6. Developing an integrated philosophy of life. (p. 2)

A set of advising objectives as varied as that offered by Upcraft and Gardner generates as many questions as it answers. Is the experience of the advisor that of a mechanic, working through a checklist of student goals and guidelines on "how to build a successful student"? How does the advisor decide which objective is

most important or most significant for a particular student? Can the advising experience be beneficial if the advisor approaches it as a "no-agenda" dialogue, choosing instead to key into a particular student's state of mind?

Bubbles in the Clay: Advisor as Potter

The traditional first-year student—usually no more than seventeen or eighteen years old—often brings to college issues and concerns unknown to the advisor, like bubbles hidden deep with the clay. How many times during countless advising sessions had I assured myself that the student sitting before me would take a particular course, or embark on a specified path that I had strongly recommended, only to learn later that the selected option was the one that I spoke most strongly against? Like the surprising—or maddening—twists and turns found in the various stages of ceramics, influences beyond my control as an advisor can render my words of caution or suggestion completely powerless.

As an advisor, I interact with my students using a repertoire based on policy and procedure, one-on-one interaction, and circumstance. The students bring to college personal issues, goals, and expectations as varied as the clays available to the potter: a desire to meet the expectations of peers, faculty, and family (Frost, 1991); needs based on disability or developmental requirements (Ender & Wilkie, 2000); concerns about cultural acclimation

(Strommer, 1995; Upcraft, 1995); and sometimes severe psychological issues (Habley, 1995, p. 6). Some students have a positive response to advising, working closely with me in the development of an academic schedule or in the exploration of private issues much as a potter engages the clay to transform itself. Other students are resistant, staving off efforts of inquiry on my part much like a course, sandy clay deflects all the potter's labor in an effort to smooth and refine its surface. How does an advisor deal with such resistance? What knowledge should an advisor possess in order to advise first-year college students who arrive on campus with so many needs?

Student development theory is often identified as a key component in advising because "People turn to theory—both formal and informal—to make the many complex facets of experience manageable, understandable, meaningful, and consistent rather than random" (McEwen, 2003, p. 154). Creamer (2000) emphasizes that a working knowledge of student development theories should be vitally important to academic advisors because "Such knowledge enables insights that allow advisors to explain conditions in students' lives that are often confusing and that sometimes block effective planning and learning" (p. 21). The effectiveness of academic advising thus "depends on the sound use of multiple theories about students and the educational institutions in which they study" (p. 18). Therefore, the effective academic advisor, Creamer maintains, needs knowledge

of "student development theory, learning theory, decision-making theory, multicultural theory (such as racial identity theory), retention theory, sociological theory, and organizational theory" (p. 18).

Turning Theory into Action

Is extensive knowledge of student development theory fundamental to advising first-year college students? What might be masked by the extensive knowledge of and use of theory in advising? As an advisor, for example, I have struggled with the dualistic tendency of first-year students, a condition described in Perry's (1968) seminal work on students' moral and ethical development. The non-questioning acceptance of authority, a feature of Perry's first stage of development, I often have experienced—with exasperation, with irritability, and usually with limited degrees of patience—as the prevalent stance taken by first-year students during course pre-registration meetings. No matter how many times I have reminded students to come to an advising session with a list of preferred courses, I find myself fuming when they arrive in my office having done absolutely no preparation. Conversations with these students are usually very similar:

> "Have you looked at the catalog to consider courses?" I ask.
>
> "Well, no," is the usual student response.
>
> "Have you brought your course schedule with you?"
>
> "No."

"Have you given any thought to any kinds of courses you might want to take?"

"Well, I have a couple that my friends suggested. But I just figured that you'd tell me the courses I need to enroll in."

Often I will take the "authority figure" approach in encounters such as these, telling the students what courses in which to enroll, reminding them of the expectations of the university, and gently chastising them for not being prepared. In retrospect, I often regret the loss of "teachable moments" about self-responsibility, but usually I have other students waiting for advising, and the moment for learning, for connecting with that student, disappears in favor of the delivery of a monologue on "Your Responsibility as a Student and as an Adult." As a result, my application of student development theory disintegrates under the reality of time and workload. Do other advisors experience this same frustration, this same regret? What is the experience for the advisor who remembers and applies the basic constructs of student development theory to each situation?

If theory is important to the advising relationship, then knowledge of its various tenets must be implemented in such a way that the advisor comfortably can splice theory and reality. How does an understanding of theory transmute itself into an interaction with a student? Rumi (1995) offers a simple theory when considering the purchase of a piece of pottery: "A man taps upon a clay pot before he

buys it to know by the sound if it has a crack" (p. 31). However, this knowing is based more on intuition and experience than on explained relationships. Can extensive knowledge of theory compensate, then, for intuition-based knowing and adequately tap into the myriad levels of personal issues and concerns facing the advisor working with first-year students? Is theory alone the obvious choice to ensure successful advising? How does the advisor "reach" the student while simultaneously sorting through a mental file cabinet full of student development theories?

A Shared Conversation

Whether based on theory or intuition, conversation between student and advisor ultimately offers the fundamental platform for engagement, using language as "the universal medium through which understanding itself is realized" (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 350). Through the spoken word, advisor and advisee communicate with each other and with the world at large, for "It is by communicating with the world that we communicate beyond all doubt with ourselves. We hold time in its entirety, and we are present to ourselves because we are present in the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 424). Can the process of advising assist advisors, through a shared conversation, in understanding the interwoven relationship of world and self, in being present to themselves and their possibilities? For potters, does the

act of creation promote communication with the world and the self? Perhaps so, according to Smith (2002):

> The making and using of pots give us a sense of place and a connection with people. . . . The making of functional pots is not about trying to make a better bowl, but about making objects that can communicate and establish a rich dialogue between maker and user. (p. 112)

What is this dialogue? Is the conversation between potter and clay similar to that which occurs between advisor and student? What is the experience of the advisor—or the potter—as one of the participants in this conversation? I think of many discussions with first-year students that shifted, almost imperceptibly, from issues of scheduling and study skills to intense outpourings regarding feelings of fear and inadequacy about college life. I think, too, of my responses to that shift: a full spectrum ranging from uncertainty, discomfort, and feelings of inadequacy to concern, empathy, and shared sorrow. "No one knows what will 'come out' in a conversation," writes Gadamer (1924/1975), because "a conversation has a spirit of its own, and . . . the language used in it bears its own truth within it" (p. 345). Palmer (2000) understands the value of conversation of another kind as he writes of the truthfulness of the dialogue between the potter and the clay:

> Everything in the universe has a nature, which means limits as well as potentials, a truth well known by people who work daily with the things of the world. Making pottery, for example, involves more than telling the clay what to become. The clay presses back on the potter's hands, telling her what it can and

> cannot do—and if she fails to listen, the outcome will be both frail and ungainly. (p. 48)

Does the conversation between potter and clay proclaim its own truth to the potter as the clay is manipulated and massaged, a truth known only to the participants? Is the advisor able to perceive the encounters with each student, encounters with unexpected twists like bubbles buried deep within a mound of clay, as opportunities for a deeper understanding of the advising experience? Again I am drawn to my primary question: **What is the lived experience of advising first-year college students?**

Clay and the First Person

Excited about exploring the illuminating possibilities of pottery as an avenue by which I might further bring forth the phenomenon of advising first-year college students, I immersed myself in literature about ceramics. With each article read or book perused, I became further convinced that the process of creating pottery—from rough clay to finished object—intersected well with my exploration of the lived experience of advising.

However, as I began my writing, I realized that a key component was missing: I had no first-hand knowledge of working with clay. I had absorbed bits of information in conversations, observed potters in action, and perused anthologies of clay techniques, but I had never tried to create an object from a lump of clay. Would my metaphor be legitimate if I had not actually experienced it myself? Could I explore

the possibilities of the metaphor if I was only observing or collecting information from secondary sources? Aristotle (1991) writes that "Metaphor most brings about learning" (p. 244), while Lakoff and Johnson (1980) emphasize that "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (p. 18). For me to be engaged fully in my investigation of the essence of first-year advising, I realized that I needed to "get hold" of my metaphor…and of clay.

Throwing Myself Into the Clay

In order to experience working with clay, I enlisted Tricia's aid. She agreed to guide me through the process of clay-building, explaining that I needed to make certain decisions about my desired outcome. "You can't just sit in front of a ball of clay and start sculpting," she said. "You need to consider the process that will direct your manipulation of the clay."

Throwing, pinching, slab-building, coiling. These techniques were available to lead me towards my goal of creating a coffee mug. Throwing is "the process of forming pieces on a revolving potter's wheel from solid lumps of clay into hollow forms" (Peterson, 2000, p. 401), while pinching is "moving and shaping clay, usually with the fingers" (Peterson, p. 399). Creating an object via slab-building involves the use of a "flat piece of clay from which shapes can be fabricated" (Peterson, p. 400). The most venerable of the building

modes is coiling, the "age-old method of constructing hollow forms by rolling and attaching ropes of soft clay" (Peterson, p. 396). Which technique would work best for my chosen outcome? Which would provide the most literal interpretation? The most opportunities for flights of fancy? The most challenge?

In claywork, technique is "the most difficult tool to master, because it is a necessity, but can so easily become an obsession. . . . . Technique is nothing if you have nothing to say with it" ("Up Front," 2000, p. 24). Where does technique figure into advising? Can the experience of the advisor be enhanced with a mastery of policies, procedures, catalogs, and deadlines? The institution at which I currently am employed, a public university of 5,000 students, has developed a set of "Academic Advising Goals" (Frostburg State University, 2001) that ostensibly serve as a guideline for effective advising:

- Assist students in developing an educational plan consistent with life goals and objectives;
- Assist students in their consideration of life goals by relating interests, skills, abilities, and values to careers, the world of work, and the nature and purpose of higher education;
- Assist students in self-understanding and self-acceptance;
- Assist students in developing decision-making skills.

Consider the etymology of "assist." Taken from the Latin *assistere* (*as-*, meaning "to, by, near to," and *sistere,* "to stand, to take a stand" [Barnhart, 1988, p. 58]), "assist" connotes a nearness, a helping hand. Is the advisor's experience best described as one of

"assisting" students, of extending "a helping hand"? Is the lived experience meaningful for advisors if they assume the role of "talking catalog," focusing on institutional knowledge and procedure? No, according to Berdahl (1995), who asserts that advising "stretches beyond instruction, beyond lectures and seminars. Its words reach students during moments of reflection when they are pondering the future and their place in it. Done well, it may require a bit of career planning, crisis counseling, and surrogate parenting all rolled into one" (p. 7).

If advising is more than technique, do all advisors bring to their advisees the combined persona described by Berdahl? Is the lived experience of advising more than a dispensing of institutional knowledge? What if an advisor feels discomfort or inadequacy in dealing with any discussions beyond academically-related topics? I considered the combination of advisor skills needed as I entered into relationship that also needed a repository of skills: forming clay on a potter's wheel.

The First Touch of Clay

From a menu that included pinching, coiling, and slab-building, ultimately I selected throwing: placing a ball of clay in the middle of a revolving pottery wheel, utilizing the rotating motion to fashion the mug, a synchronous collaboration of material, hand, and motion. The actual throwing of the clay, however, was preceded by preparation of

the clay. Tricia instructed me to take approximately one pound of clay and mold it into a ball. I looked at the clay—a passive mound of grayish-brown substance—and I tried very hard to visualize the coffee mug that would hopefully rise from the interaction between hand and clay. Tricia explained the process of kneading the clay, because it was important "to teach the platelets of the clay to go in one direction." Taking a deep, nervous breath, I touched the clay for the first time, encountering a smooth, cool surface, feeling a soft resistance as I began to coax the clay into a consistency suitable for the wheel.

What does it mean to do something for the first time? Are the memories more vivid, the recollection more intense? I recall my first true advising session as a professional administrator, sitting in my office nervously shuffling advising forms and catalogs as I waited for Elaine, a first-year student, to arrive for her initial meeting with me. Prior experiences in advising had been limited to working in the aggregate with student organizations, focusing on interpersonal problems, leadership development, and organizational issues. I had never really dealt with the intricacies of academic programs in my previous relationships with students, and I felt woefully unprepared. How was I going to assist Elaine effectively? However, ninety minutes—and a substantial amount of stammering—later, Elaine and

I successfully developed a four-year academic plan that could guide her through the requirements for a degree in geography.

After Elaine left, I shut my office door to reflect on my first experience in academic advising. On one hand, I dismissed my participation as simply playing the role of "administrative guidepost": explaining University policy, outlining degree requirements, emphasizing deadlines. However, these functions could not account for the physical response I experienced when Elaine thanked me for alleviating her confusion about preparing for various majors: a warm inner glow, as if a fire deep within me had been stoked to life. I realized that I felt genuine interest in and concern for Elaine, not only for her academic plans, but also as an individual with her own unique set of talents and goals. I recalled having shared with Elaine my own journey that had led me to holding the position of academic advisor: changing majors three times, dropping out of college to work as a janitor and a factory laborer to earn tuition for graduate school, experiencing the inner joy of finally engaging in my life's vocation. I distinctly remember feeling that strong desire that my self-disclosure might somehow assist her in her decision-making, that somewhere in our conversation I had offered advice or encouragement that would be meaningful to her. In my meeting with Elaine, I had experienced academic advising for the first time, and I knew—intuitively, in

retrospect, more than cognitively—that I wanted to continue in my role as an academic advisor.

Friere (in hooks, 1994), maintains that "Authentic help means that all who are involved help each other mutually, growing together in the common effort to understand the reality which they seek to transform" (p. 54). Was the advising relationship with Elaine the initiation of a process of change for her? In retrospect, the session with Elaine began a journey of learning for me, as I looked within my own self to acknowledge a personal need for human engagement that I had not encountered outside the confines of my immediate family.

Of consequence, then, is the issue of the advisor's self. Sarton (in Palmer, 1998) writes:

> Now I become self. It's taken
> Time, many years, and places;
> I have been dissolved and shaken,
> Worn other peoples' faces . . . (p. 9)

Do advisors understand the importance of caring for and centering on their self? Do advisors realize the importance of self-understanding as a contributor to effective advising? Hurd (2000) intuits that the boundaries of self often limit opportunities for involvement, for expression of individuality:

> We're the culture that values a dependable, separate self. We're not only the ones with the crayons, trying to stay inside the lines; we're the ones who produce those books in the first place, the ones who've drawn the thick black lines. Something about us insists that who we are and how we interact with each other be as straight-lined, demarcated, and geometrical as our buildings, parking lots, and highways. (p. 76)

Does an advisor's "dependable, separate self" inhibit the full experience of advising first-year college students? Is such a self truly self-sufficient, or is it in need of attention in order to break beyond its boundaries, to engage its own human-ness before the experience of advising can truly be realized in all its depth? According to Palmer (2000), self-care is integral to the helping relationship: "Anytime we can listen to true self and give it the care it requires, we do so not only for ourselves but for the many others whose lives we touch" (p. 30).

Centering by Hand and in Mind

Centering, the focusing on the needs and desires of the inner self, is fundamental to self-understanding—and to success on the pottery wheel. My decision to "throw" my pot required an introduction to the pottery wheel (an apparatus best described as a sawed-off piano stool connected to a platform supporting a mechanism resembling a rotating pizza pan). Straddling the stool and leaning over the rotating work surface, I placed the clay on the wheel and depressed the foot pedal to initiate the wheel's counter-clockwise spinning motion. In order to coax the mug out of the clay, I first had to center the ball of clay in the middle of the wheel. For potters, the centering is an act of primal importance,

> that act which precedes all others on the potter's wheel. The bringing of the clay into a spinning, unwobbling pivot, which will then be free to take innumerable shapes as potter and clay press against each other. The firm, sensitive pressure which yields as much as it asserts. It is like a handclasp between two

> living hands, receiving the greeting at the very moment that they give it. (Richards, 1962, p. 9)

I struggled to justify in my mind Richards' poetic description of centering with what was occurring on the wheel in front of me: an irregularly-shaped, revolving lump of clay, its orbit resembling the elliptical path of Mercury around the sun.

In order to center the clay, I had to push on the outside of the ball with my left hand while pushing the top of the ball down into the wheel with the outside edge of my right hand. I maneuvered the speed of the wheel ("Too fast and the clay will fly right off!") while watching the clay's orbit to see if it was attaining a more circular path. Any slip in concentration sent the clay into an oblong shape, and I had to focus on bringing it back into a circular form.

In fact, centering is for the potter "one of the most vital and difficult steps to learn" (Woody, 1975, p. 10), for it is the preface to any successful construction of a thrown pot. If the clay is centered correctly, the potter is able to "bring the images in, down, up, smoothly, centered, and then to allow them the kind of breath they cannot have if all they know how to be is passionate or repressed" (Richards, 1962, p. 12).

What does "center" mean? Etymologically, the word evolved from an Indo-European base of *kent-* ("to prick"), then to the Greek *kentron* ("sharp point, goad") and ultimately to the Latin *centrum*, or center, which originally designated the fixed point of the two points on

a compass (Barnhart, 1988, p. 155). What, then, is the "fixed point" for the advisor in an advising session? Does the advisor focus on procedure, working consciously to avoid discussions of a personal nature? What if the advisor's "center" is built on stereotypes or suppositions about a student's background or abilities? Can the "center" be technique to the exclusion of personal issues, for either the student or the advisor?

Shove and Shape, Evaluate and Scrape

Centering, as a fundamental framework for throwing a clay vessel, requires the interplay of muscle, vision, touch, and concentration. Since I expected the clay to stay moist all the time, I was amazed to realize that constant wetting of my hands was required because I was building up friction quite literally as my drying hand pressed against clay that was rapidly losing moisture. The continued addition of water had to be managed, however, or else the clay would become saturated and too unstable to hold a shape. As a result, I concurrently shoved, shaped, and evaluated. I constantly removed accumulated clay from my hands, scraping the residue on the edge of a trash basket, splashing drippings of clay-tinted water across the floor, markings that resembled the elongated trails left by the "dirt-dauber" wasp that built its mud nest in my home's eaves last summer. At the same time, I manipulated the foot pedal to increase or decrease the wheel's speed while attempting to maintain consistent

pressure between my hands as I cajoled the clay to the "perfect center" of the wheel.

Advising is much like the "multi-tasking" of centering clay, in that the advising process requires a constant attention to many intersecting factors. On one hand, an advisor must be cognizant of the realities of a first-year student's life:

> The expectations of college professors are higher than those of high school teachers, course material is covered at faster rates, and students are expected to take more responsibility for their learning. Many freshmen must also adjust to new living environments, make new friends, and participate in new activities. They are in charge of their own time. Apportionment of time between classes, for studying, social activities, and perhaps a part-time or full-time job is up to them. (Frost, 1991, p. 44)

At the same time, an advisor acutely must be aware of any signs that the student is in need of more than academic or career information. This sensitivity is particularly important because "It is common for entering students to struggle . . . until they are either overwhelmed or someone within the institution recognizes a problem and takes measures to help" (Hart, 1995, p. 77). What subtle hints, remarks, or body language would alert the advisor that this student may be one of those described by Rogers (1969) as "one of many, many people living in private dungeons today, people who give no evidence of it whatever on the outside, where you have to listen very sharply to hear the faint messages from the dungeon" (p. 227)?

How does an advisor manage all these cues? What if the advisor is distracted by personal issues, centering on an inner turmoil rather than on the student? Perhaps advising may not be a primary responsibility, and a student in need arrives at a time of encroaching deadlines or non-advising crises. Can the advisor truly be tuned to the subtle shadings of "a deep human cry, a 'silent scream,' that lies buried and unknown" (Rogers, 1969, p. 223) when the student's appearance is an unwanted interruption, an additional demand piled on top of already-pressing duties?

I pondered these questions as I recalled my unexpected session with Rick. Within two weeks of the end of the semester, he had appeared at my door, waiting patiently to talk to me because he had not scheduled an appointment. At the time, budget reviews demanded every spare minute: dozens of number-filled sheets littered my desk, the budget director waited impatiently on the phone, and I had to submit projected revenues for summer school within the hour. Explaining to the budget director that I would return his call "in just a few minutes," I straightened my desk, took a couple of deep breaths, and attempted to re-direct my thoughts from budget deficits to individual students.

As I invited Rick into my office, I was struck by his personification of the first-year Everyman: a ready smile for everyone coupled with the requisite swagger that accompanies a young man

projecting to all who saw him that he was ready to "take on the world." However, Rick's confident mannerisms belied a tumultuous past. He had been suspended from college after completing only one semester and sixteen credit hours, an action that had resulted in a nine-month separation from the University and a re-entry agreement predicated on strict expectations, thus allowing him to return to his status as a first-year student. I also knew that Rick was experiencing academic problems, for I had received mid-semester grade reports on his performance. Our first meeting had been a perfunctory exchange of information, and I hoped that this unplanned meeting would be the same so that I could return to my budget problems.

Initially, our dialogue carried all the earmarks of a standard academic advising session: a review of his status in each course, a calculation of the minimum grade point average needed to stay in school, a survey of courses in which he had expressed an interest in enrolling the next semester. As talk about academically-related issues subsided, I directed the conversation toward a logical conclusion, preparing myself to usher Rick from my office so that I could attend to the budget director's entreaties as soon as Rick left.

However, as I stood to signify an end to our meeting, I sensed in Rick an unspoken burden weighing heavily on his mind. Returning to my seat, I said, "Rick, is there something else?"

Hesitantly at first, and then like waves crashing over a floodgate, Rick unleashed his frustration and fear over what the next few weeks would bring if he did not succeed academically, and what had transpired in his life during the nine months away from college. His suspension had been in response to his violation of the terms of his probationary period, sanctions imposed after he was found guilty of possession of prescription drugs issued in someone else's name. When he returned home, he was tried and convicted in criminal court and had served two months of a twelve-month jail sentence. He was re-admitted to the university at the beginning of the semester, but was struggling in his courses. His class attendance had been erratic over the past three weeks because several bones in his foot had been crushed in an automobile accident. He was still dealing with the anger generated as a result of his parents' combative divorce four years previously as he tried to make sense of what his options were if he were academically dismissed.

"What if I don't pass my courses?" he said, tears streaming down his cheeks as he wiped them with the back of his hands like a small child. "I can't go home again and live with my father. I have to prove I can handle this."

In the two-hour session that followed, I wonder if I gave Rick the attention he needed. Did I reveal any frustrations, any lack of interest in the depth of personal feelings he shared because I had, at the time,

other priorities? Did I ultimately project an attitude of concern that led to his catharsis? Did I engage in empathic listening, a listening "with intent to understand" (Covey, 1989, p. 240), the type of listening in which I could truly understand his frame of reference?

Listening for the Form Within

Perhaps listening is not exclusively the arena of the auditory organ. Kierkegaard (in Levin, 1989) observes that "The ear is the most spiritual of the senses" (p. 45). Yet, as I worked to center my clay on the potter's wheel, as the ball of clay revolved between my hands, I began to "hear" the clay in a non-auditory way, slowly realizing that

> With listening . . . it is not the ear that hears, it is not the physical organ that performs that act of inner receptivity. It is the total person who hears. Sometimes the skin seems to be the best listener, as it prickles and thrills, say to a sound or a silence; or the fantasy, the imagination: how it bursts into inner pictures as it listens and then responds by pressing its language, its forms, into the listening clay. (Richards, 1962, p. 9)

My total person perceived the value of small pushes and prods in my efforts to the center mound of clay on the wheel. My senses focused completely on the task at hand: creating a foundation for future work by perfectly positioning a mound of clay, the wheel a revolving canvas from which the mug that I heard speaking to me from within the clay would ultimately—and hopefully—appear.

Do advisors "pay attention" or "try to hear" (to draw from "listen's" root word, *lusnen* [Barnhart, 1988, p. 601]) what a student is

saying? Does an advisor listen with and to the whole person? What role does listening play in the experience of advising? Perhaps it is to help students "to listen to themselves, to heed the speech of their own body of experience, and to become, each one, the human being he or she most deeply wants to be" (Gendlin, in Levin, 1989, p. 88). However, listening is not limited only to the messages being sent by the student. Does the advisor listen to the private, inner voice within, the voice that speaks from a visceral level, the voice that brings to words responses from the deepest recesses of the psyche, responses that are unrehearsed and void of filtering? Are these words heard and heeded, or are they pushed by the advisor to the background in favor of a more "politically correct" response? Has the advisor, then, removed truth from the advising experience?

In a study of the grading practices of instructors of first-year college composition courses, Sommers (2001) postulates that "Most teachers' comments are not text-specific and could be interchanged, rubber-stamped, from text to text" (p. 214). Her direction to teachers—to respond to students' essays based on thoughtful, individualized reading—correlates to the importance of advisors responding to student issues based on objective, focused listening. Yet, how often have I found myself impatient with what I perceive to be a student's attitudes, opinions, or questions, planning my comments before the student has finished speaking, thinking to

myself, "The answer is obvious, if you'd only listen to me!" Is advising part of a human-to-human act of speaking and listening, each individual bringing to the exchange certain limitations and expectations? If so, then Levin (1989) clearly describes the pitfalls encountered in inadequate listening, missteps that could easily be applied to the advising relationship:

> We sometimes encounter people and things, and enter into situations, with great openness, eager to enjoy a fresh experience; at other times, we tend to encounter people and things, and enter into situations, with closed minds and deaf ears—anxious, tense, defensive, perhaps, or perhaps with our minds already set, our course of action fixed, and our experience prejudged, predetermined. We sometimes begin an encounter absolutely certain of our knowledge and understanding, absolutely convinced that we have nothing to learn from the encounter itself: we enter the situation totally under the spell of our stereotype, our preconceptions. We can hear only what we want to hear, or what we already know and believe; we can hear nothing different, nothing new. (p. 19)

Do advisors individualize their listening to each student? Do advisors consciously strive to avoid stereotypical or pre-judged responses? What occurs when there is a difference of gender and/or race between advisor and advisee?

<u>The Diversity of Listening: To Clay, to Students</u>

As I focused on the revolving clay, I asked Tricia if all clays were suitable for throwing on the wheel. I learned that each clay has its own level of plasticity and malleability; for example, true porcelain cannot be wheel-thrown because of its non-plastic composition. "I

know it sounds strange," Tricia said, "but you have to listen to each clay."

Listening to the clay is a concept that seems at odds with its parts. Yet, to a potter the connection to the clay is like that of a teacher to a student:

> In order to teach, you must be able to listen. You must be able to hear what the person before you means. You cannot assume the meanings and be a teacher; you must enter again into a dialogue—with all senses alert to the human meanings expressed, however implicitly. The experience of the potter listening to his clay strengthens this capacity. One must be able to hear the inner questions, the unspoken ones; the inner hopes and misgivings and dreams and timidities and potentialities and stupidities. One must listen carefully in order to serve as a proper midwife to the birth of consciousness in the student. The world is always bigger than one's focus. (Richards, 1962, p. 21)

For the potter, the engagement with each clay is different, the listening at various levels of intensity, depending on the clay's composition. Do I, as a middle-aged Caucasian male, engage in the same empathic listening process, like that of a potter in response to the clay, when I work with students who are not of the same ethnicity? Am I able to hear infinite nuances of concern, or joy, or pain in conversations with female students? Belenky et al. (1986) observe that many institutions of higher education "clearly abdicate their own responsibility for helping students formulate their own agendas for learning; they rob women students of the support most of them need in order to break free" (p. 213). Can I truly be supportive and understanding of issues identified by Belenky et al. (e.g.,

powerlessness, loss of sense of self, a knowledge-receiver rather than a knowledge-creator) when, by my birth, I am considered a child of the post-war, pre-integration, "Ozzie and Harriet," "Father Knows Best," white male bastion? Do I misunderstand issues important to female students because such concerns or obstacles are not in my range of comprehension?

A growing wave of student differences—based on race, gender, culture, or sexual orientation—rapidly is becoming the hallmark of a diverse, multi-ethnic university. What is the experience of the advisor in such an environment? Merleau-Ponty (1962) observes that "We may speak several languages, but one of them always remains the one in which we live. In order completely to assimilate a language, it would be necessary to make the world which it expresses one's own, and one never does belong to two worlds at once" (p. 187).

The conflict of difference is even more pronounced when I serve as advisor to Black, Asian American, or Latino/Latina students. No matter how hard I try, could I ever understand adequately the social structures, hierarchies, and priorities of another culture? According to the U. S. Department of Education (2002), in its report, "The Condition of Education 2002," minority students "represented nearly a third of all undergraduates in 1999-2000, up from about a quarter in 1989-1990" (p. 97). As for the future, according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 2, 2000), "Over the next 15 years, enrollment

at American colleges will increase by 19 percent, to 16 million, and minority students will account for 80 percent of that growth" (p. A51).

In response to the growing racial and cultural mix on college campuses, advisors have been encouraged to engage in serious self-study:

> Advisors should be aware of the interactional dynamics between themselves and their advisees. This includes but is not limited to observing both the verbal and non-verbal actions of advisees. To be effective, advisors should be knowledgeable about their advisees' racial and cultural backgrounds, aspects of the presented advising concerns, and the interaction between the two. A crucial aspect of advisor knowledge is the extent to which advisors are able to understand advisees rather than attempt to force them into an overgeneralized advising paradigm. (Priest & McPhee, 2000, p. 112)

Additionally, Strommer (1995) admonishes advisors to remember and respect the diversity within each racial group, explaining that in dealing with students of color, "Generalizations are highly suspect" (p. 32) and further observing:

> While few faculty are ever intentionally discriminatory in their dealings with students, giving advice on the basis of untested assumptions or making judgments on the basis of culturally derived behavior can have the same effect. Some African American students are underprepared for college level work, but others are Merit Scholars. Some Latino students come from poor inner-city schools; others from the finest private preparatory schools. Some Asian American students come from families that have been U. S. citizens for three or more generations; other are recent immigrants. Although Latino, Native American, and African American students graduate from college at a lower rate than white students, Asian American students graduate at a higher rate than any other group. The student who does not speak up may not be passive; the student who refuses eye contact may not be shifty. Each may instead be demonstrating the preferred cultural behavior. (p. 32)

Do my comments and suggestions assist these students, who bring to the advising session a heritage and culture so drastically different from my own? On what level can we connect, can we communicate? Will my efforts be considered patronizing? Can I ever hope to understand the issues faced by students whose cultures or gender have historically been marginalized by society?

In interpreting the experience of Black freshmen, Pounds (1989) writes:

> Perhaps the first developmental challenges that most Black college freshmen face—and must overcome—is their perception that predominantly white institutions are unfair, unresponsive, nonsupportive, unfriendly, and self-negating. Cultural and racial identities of Black students are integral parts of their self-actualization and must be maintained. But the negative environmental perceptions can inhibit social, intellectual, moral, and emotional development. (p. 278)

My advising session with Howard, a Black first-year student from Baltimore, clearly stands out as a reminder of the cultural confusion that exists for me, as an advisor, within the broader context of issues of campus climate as perceived by Pounds. Howard had returned to campus to continue his first year of college after having been academically dismissed the previous year, earning only three credit hours and a cumulative grade point average of 0.1 on a 4.0 scale. He had asked that he not be assigned to his original advisor; as a result, he was placed on my roster of advisees. Our conversation was short and to the point, but saturated with my concerns, played through my head in an internal dialogue.

"Welcome back, Howard. Are you glad to be returning to school?" *(Do you really want to be here? Tell me why you came back. Give me some sort of indication that you are ready to tackle college-level work.)*

"Yes, I guess." *(Why such a short answer? Am I not making enough effort to be approachable, to be understanding? Am I expecting a certain response? Am I being too pushy?)*

"Can you help me understand what happened last time you were here? You earned four F's and a D." *(Howard, I am truly concerned about your welfare. I want to understand what happened in your life. Do you have any specific academic goals? Is it important to you or your family? Help me understand.)*

"Personal stuff." *(Do you think that I am unable to understand? Perhaps understanding is not a possibility. Am I able to be empathic? What do I—the older white man sitting behind a big desk—represent to you? Do I represent anything? Am I heaping preconceptions upon you regarding your personal goals and values, built within the framework of my own middle-class white existence?)*

"Ok, then. Have you given any thought to what you would like to take this semester?" *(Give me a little direction. You seem so disinterested. Why? Are we so different in our goals? What did you learn as a child about goal-setting and personal ambition? Am I assuming that you have not been exposed to these concepts?)*

"No." *(Why not? What about the money being spent for your education? Wait a minute. Am I assuming that you do not have any focus? Perhaps you are shy, or tired, or sick.)*

"Do you have any particular interests that you would like to explore while working on required courses?" *(There must be something that appeals to you. Even students not focused on a specific major have a general area that they might investigate. I want to ask more, but I am worried that you think I might be prying. Maybe in your culture being uncommitted is important; maybe in your culture discussions with white men are considered useless or part of the University's power structure. I just do not understand.)*

"No."

The advising session ended with my selecting four courses that Howard needed to repeat. He signed his course request card, we exchanged pleasant but impersonal goodbyes, and he left. I wondered if he would come back to see me again, or if I had already been relegated to nothing more than the name on his schedule card. Did my internal dialogue influence my discussion with him? What could I have done to show that I was truly concerned about him? Had I shortchanged Howard because I assumed we were so culturally different? If so, did I have these assumptions when I saw him standing in my door? Whatever the cause, the nagging sense of failure that enveloped me as I returned to the administrative projects

on my desk remained for the rest of that day—and continues, because Howard again was dismissed for academic performance at the conclusion of that semester. As of this writing, he has not returned.

No Room for Failure

Failure was not an option as I finally centered the ball of clay in the middle of the pottery wheel. The next step—the opening of a center hole that would hopefully become the interior of my imagined coffee mug—began as I placed my right thumb in the middle of the ball and initiated the wheel's rotation by depressing a foot lever. I pushed downward on my right thumb with my left thumb, slowly creating an indentation that became larger and deeper with each rotation. I was "driving blind" in some respects because I could not tell when I was near the bottom, and I knew that I did not want to punch through to the wheel and then have to start the process again. Starting over was not on my list of alternative actions, as far as I was concerned. I had made the commitment to this particular lump of clay, and I wanted it to become the mug that I had envisioned in my mind.

Do advisors resolutely develop a pre-determined course of action for their students, much as I had adamantly decided that I would not start the building process over again? Does such stubbornness play a part in advising? If a person is stubborn, then an "unreasonable or perverse obstinance" (Costello et al., 1992, p.

1326) dominates. Am I perceived as unreasonable because I want the student to take the direction I have identified, or because I am determined that the student's potential be developed as I interpret it? Does the advisor ever really know "the right direction" for a student? Does a potter ever really know the "right direction" for the clay?

As students are unique, so are the various types of pottery clays. Some fire at different temperatures, others use various types of kilns or take only specific types of glazes. If a potter fervently believes that the correct match of clay, glaze, and temperature has been established—but ultimately proves to be incorrect—the results can be unexpected and maddening. This same response occurs when an advisor believes that an appropriate course of action for a particular student is readily apparent. If the advisor can see it, why is it so difficult for the student?

Jodie, a gregarious director of an undergraduate tutoring program, recounts an advising episode shaded with this kind of exasperation:

> I can't get through to that student to say that computer science [as a major] is not for him. The student doesn't necessarily have this passion for computers, but in the back of his mind is the idea that computer science is a field in which he can earn a lot of money . . . I get a feeling of frustration because without saying, 'You're a dumb so-and-so and you're not ever going to be able to do this,' I get the feeling of frustration because he just won't listen.

Is an advisor's determination to "find the right path" the basis of such feelings of frustration? Does an advisor feel that the right answer is

there for the student's taking, without question or response? If the advisor considers the relationship to be a form of teaching, is there anger because the student will not "learn the lesson"?

Such a relationship is vividly illustrated in Emlyn Williams' (1942) play, Th*e Corn is Green*. Miss Moffat, the play's central character, is a wealthy unmarried woman who moves to a small Welsh mining community after inheriting a home from her uncle. She decides that it will be her mission in life to turn her home into a school in order to educate the young men working in the local coal mines. She focuses her attention on a seventeen-year-old miner, Morgan Evans, in whom she sees an intelligent mind coupled with a natural aptitude for writing. Morgan initially appreciates the opportunity to learn ("I want to get more clever still. I want to know what is behind all them books." [Williams, 1942, p. 958]), but as his education progresses he becomes more disenchanted with the path Miss Moffat has identified for him. Miss Moffat's amazement that Morgan disagrees with her plans creates a tension that crescendoes to the play's climax. Did Miss Moffat's stubborn adherence to a pre-determined path cloud her perception of Morgan's individuality? Why is it difficult for an advisor to consider that a student could prefer an alternative option? Does a student really want an advisor's accumulated wisdom, or just a safe place to explore new ideas?

Never as Easy as It Looks

When I was ready for the next step in my pottery pilgrimage, I knew that I wanted Tricia's accumulated wisdom, because I had no idea how to take the clay—that was rotating in front of me like a wet dog dish—and change it into any sort of useable object. Then she demonstrated how to "pull up the sides," the procedure I always had equated with potters. "Side-pulling" looked so deceptively easy in the University's ceramics studio: the potter at one with her clay, a "cosmic bond" forming between the artist and the medium, the sides of a vessel slowly rising out of a mound of clay like a phoenix from the ashes. These images, however, quickly were dispelled as I made my first attempt at "side-pulling." The trick was to use my two index fingers, one inside the mug pushing out, the other on the exterior of the mug exerting inward force, pulling up with equal parts force and speed. On my first attempt, my right hand took control and I gouged out the side, creating a grotesque screw-shaped form. After re-forming the clay into a ball, I made my second try, only to have the mug's side flare away from the center, the perfect vision of a perverse spinning cuspidor. Eventually, Tricia gave me some "hands-on" instruction—quite literally, holding my hands in place and directing them—and I gradually persuaded out of the clay the shape of a mug. Slowly and hesitantly, my lump of clay had taken on a new life. It was now a vessel, capable in its finished state of serving as a

container. I was transfixed. The collaborative efforts of my fingers, my brain, and my vision had coaxed a recognizable form out of an undistinguished lump of clay.

As "pulling the sides" in pottery requires more talent than expected, so, too, does advising first-year college students. In a discussion with my neighbor regarding our respective work responsibilities (he a high school teacher, I an academic administrator and advisor) my neighbor decided that I had the easier of the two jobs. "Advising freshmen must really be easy," he said. "You just tell them what they need to do, and they'll listen." I recall dismissing the comment with a smile, knowing that no amount of words or proof would dispel his assumption that advising freshmen is the human equivalent of a computer's point-and-click selection process. How could he understand that an advisor's role is an ever-shifting combination of academic data bank, disciplinarian, crisis counselor, surrogate parent, or friend?

Is a particular blend of skill, personality, and conviction a prerequisite to working with first-year students? According to King (2000), "Academic advising has evolved from a simplistic, routine, perfunctory course-scheduling activity to a complex process of student development requiring comprehensive knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that can be learned and enhanced" (p. 289). In theory, perhaps, every individual can expand and enhance a base

of knowledge in order to become an effective advisor. However, is this form of professional growth fully universal? Can an advisor adequately confront the complexities of today's students' lives through sheer interest and concern and without the ability to integrate the knowledge base espoused by King?

I recently read a collection of essays entitled *Stirring the Mud: On Swamps, Bogs, and Human Imagination*, written by Barbara Hurd, a friend of many years. I was fascinated by Barbara's interpretations of the Finzel Swamp, "a land still shadowed by the Arctic . . . a relict community formed thousands of years ago when the icy tongues of glaciers pushed Canadian flora and fauna south for hundreds of miles" (Hurd, 2001, p. 1). At the time I read her book, I was devoid of the necessary spark that would ignite a flurry of dissertation writing. I thought, "If Barb found inspiration there, perhaps I will, too." So, on a humid, cloudless Thursday afternoon I drove to the swamp, a scant ten miles from my home. Leaving the asphalt road, my car plunged into a two-rut, overgrown trail with a thicket of weeds and trees crowding both sides, their branches groping and scratching at the sides of my car. The road ended in a clearing, the entrance to the swamp marked by a weathered engraved wood sign.

Taking the footpath to the swamp, I paused, listening to what was not there. No cars, no television, no lawn mowers; instead, I heard the soft rustle of the swamp reeds as the wind blew, the

croaking of small “peeper” frogs, the splashes in the water as a turtle avoided interaction with me and propelled itself underwater.

I waited for the stroke of creativity that I knew I would find here. I sat on the edge of the swamp, trying to drink in the images, trying to “become one” with the swamp and its environs. But after an hour’s contemplation, I realized that my inspiration had to be found somewhere else. The insights that Barbara had found, that she had explored so poetically in her book, had completely eluded me. I could not understand the philosophy of the larch trees or the truths hidden in the skunk cabbage. I had the interest, but not the ability.

Can an advisor truly connect with a student if there is only interest and no level of ability based on an understanding of student development issues, of cultural relationships, of gender differences? Training for academic advisors exists “to increase the effectiveness of advising services provided to students, thus increasing student satisfaction and persistence” (King, 2000, p. 291). However, can training inculcate the ability to engage a student empathetically in discussions about academic expectations, future plans, and personal issues? What persona exists in those advisors who offer a safe and caring place for first-year students? What is the best combination of knowledge and person-ness to engage in successful first-year advising?

Point/Counterpoint

"The most practical thing we can achieve in any kind of work is insight into what is happening inside us as we do it" (Palmer, 1998, p. 5). Advising has always made me aware of "what is happening inside" whenever I engage in conversations with individual students. Similarly, as I concentrated on "finessing" the shape of my clay, I was aware of my emotional and mental response to the process. I placed the outside of the little finger of my right hand on the top of the nascent mug and slowly pushed downward. Now I had a rim, albeit one much too thick to serve as an adequate lip for drinking. So I returned to side-pulling, following it with rim-flattening—a process I repeated at least five times. But with each pressure, each point and counterpoint of flesh to clay, a mug's shaped emerged, with the walls a little thinner, the shape a little more refined. With each subtle manipulation of the clay, my pride in my mug grew.

I watched my hands, mesmerized by the effect the slightest contraction of my fingers had on the revolving shape before me. A little too much pressure with one hand created a revolving oblong shape. A push with one finger resulted in a ring on the mug's surface, appearing either gradually or immediately, depending on the force I applied. I learned how to focus pressure on the inside of the mug to create a bowl-shaped base, and then I bent the mug's upper rim outward to flare the edges.

I lost myself in the clay as I created subtle changes in the mug's shape. My whole scope of being was reduced to hands, clay, and a revolving platform. I no longer heard the television in the background, no longer acknowledged the growing pain in my lower back. I connected with an inanimate substance, infusing it with my own life force to bring forth my vision.

As I formed my mug, I realized the significance of the smallest touch, the slightest pressure, the subtle shifting of my hands. In advising, the offering of encouragement and support is much like the indentation in the pot caused by a slight shift of a finger. The effect on a student can be a pointed source of growth and decision, even though the advisor may not be aware of the implications of comments made in an advising session. My encounter with Keith, which led ultimately to my exploration of the phenomenon of academic advising, clearly illustrates the impact of advice given, of the advisor offering encouragement without fully realizing the effect of the words spoken.

The word "encourage" derives from the Old English *encoragen*, "to inspire with courage, to make bold" (Barnhart, 1998, p. 328). Consider the result of one such conversation on Dr. E. Grady Bogue (1991) in recalling a dialogue with his professor and faculty advisor:

> Bert Nothern did one thing for me for which I will always remain indebted. I grew up thinking a doctoral degree was something you needed to practice medicine. It never occurred to me that I should aspire to that degree. But while working on my master's degree and taking a statistics course with Bert Nothern, he took me aside and encouraged me to think about pursuing doctoral

> work. That was a powerful act of teaching—an act of encouragement—that set my life on a new course. What a difference those few moments in his office made in my future. (p. 8)

Are such words from an advisor a conscious attempt "to inspire with courage, to make bold," or do they come naturally as part of the advising process? Do advisors truly inspire their students? "Inspire" is rooted in the concept "to breathe upon or into," from the Latin *inspirare* (Barnhart, 1988, p. 532). Do advisors "breathe into" their students the desire to excel? Is this "breathing-into" a natural occurrence, much like the regular exchange of air in the lungs, that is unnoticed by the individual but necessary for life? Do students look to advisors for encouragement, for support, for inspiration?

After having devoted countless hours to background reading for my dissertation, I rewarded myself for ten straight hours of writing with the rental of the film *Finding Forrester* (King & Wolf, 2000). In this film, the title character (James Forrester),a reclusive author, befriends a young high school student (Jamal) who possesses a gift for writing. Forrester tacitly states that he knows what Jamal will do in his near future, "just like I know you're going to that new school," a pending decision which has caused Jamal much consternation. Jamal asks, "How do you know that?" Forrester turns and replies, "Because there's a question in your writing, suggesting what you want to do with your life, and that's a question that your present school cannot answer." No direct advice is given, no words of encouragement

are offered. Yet Jamal ultimately understands the statement of support, of encouragement implied in Forrester's observation.

As I returned to my reading the following day, and then as I took my first tentative steps in putting words to paper, I found myself thinking again about that particular scene in *Finding Forrester*. Do advisors know when to overtly suggest a course of action, and when to "take a back seat" and let the student find the way? Does an advisor have the patience to allow the student to consider options, weigh consequences, select a path? How does it feel to encourage and to see the student commit to a personal decision? In discussing how he tries to relate to students, Tim, an associate dean of students, outlines his philosophy of encouragement:

> I try to communicate with them, I guess, their intrinsic worth, my respect, my belief that their own actions while here, their decisions, their choices, can make a huge difference in the quality of their experience, and the potential they'll leave here with, both because of activities they've been involved with, and more importantly, their growth as individuals.

Is Tim, then, a mentor? If the root of the word "mentor" is traced, then all advisors have the potential of being mentors, for mentor is derived from the Greek *Mentor*, the name of a friend and advisor to Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey* (Barnhart, 1988, p. 652). Barnhart (1988) postulates that mentor ultimately means advisor, because of the "agent noun related to the Greek *menos*: intent, purpose, spirit, passion" (1988, p. 652).

Do I see myself as a mentor? In certain advising sessions, I have caught myself hoping that the words I say will resonate with the student. Am I consciously attempting to become a mentor? Can this distinction even be accomplished in such a pre-meditated manner? Why is this "label" important to me? Palmer (1998) observes that "The power of our mentors . . . is in their capacity to awaken a truth within us, a truth we can reclaim years later by recalling their impact on our lives" (p. 21). Is this a connection that I want to make with my students, a connection across years to a dialogue that ultimately changed the course of a student's life?

When Enough is Too Much

Ultimately, mentoring is not fabricated; rather, it is often borne out of a subjective response by an advisor to a comment or suggestion made by a student, but a response that has particular meaning for that particular point in time, much like Tricia's passing comment when I was working on forming the body of my mug. As I continued the molding and shaping of the body, Tricia told me to stop the wheel, and she surveyed my work. "Your mug has a good form, but I think you need to quit there," she said. Stepping back from the wheel, she looked critically at my mug's form and said, "You know, that's really good for your first time." I felt a pride of accomplishment that pushed out of view my mindset of frustration, a response that Tricia never

even knew she had initiated until we discussed the process after dinner a few days later.

With the work on the wheel completed, Tricia then demonstrated how to take a thin, tightly-held wire and draw it beneath the base of the mug to separate it from the now-still wheel. When the mug was completely released from the wheel, I slowly slid it into my cupped right hand and gently moved it to the work table. Tricia asked, "Well, what do you think about your first mug?" I just stared at the shaped clay form before me. Granted, the mug would never win any prizes—the base was too thin, the walls much too thick, the handle laughably large—but to me, it was as beautiful as any ceramic object I had ever seen. A part of my soul had settled in this mug, a connection to the clay from which it sprung that I had never expected. It was unimportant to me that the mug's aesthetic value was limited. I realized how disappointed I would have been if something had happened during the throwing process that would have prompted beginning again. I knew that this mug was an object that I wished to save, a physical reminder of my successfully tackling the challenge of the wheel.

Often in advising I will consider a particular student as a challenge, positioning this student in my mind as the one in need of rescue from some nebulous fate, remembering the admonition from my professional literature that "First-year college students are

notorious for not realizing they are in need of assistance until well after the fact" (Hart, 1995, p. 76). But from what am I saving this student? Do I understand the intricacies of the situation? Does this student want the kind of attention that I have decided I will bestow? Why this particular student? Why would I not treat all students the same way?

Lori was one of those students that I had decided to "save." My meetings with her increased both in duration and in number as the semester drew to an end, because she was dealing with serious emotional issues that were compounded by pressure from home to perform academically. As a result, she was failing every class in which she was enrolled. However, my frustration grew exponentially with each passing session as I began to see Lori as a student who did not want to learn about herself or to deal with the issues facing her. Instead, I viewed her as a complainer, a student who identified everything wrong with her life but who made no attempts to help herself.

Our last advising session began like all the previous sessions: a recap of all the issues aired since her arrival on campus eight months earlier, Lori regaling against teachers who were not fair, parents who did not understand, and friends who were never available when she needed them. Then she announced, "I've decided to withdraw from all my classes this semester. I just can't take the pressure. No one will

help me." I had a visceral reaction to her last comment, wanting to look her squarely in the face and ask, "Who do you think has been listening to you for the past semester?" Remembering that I had "to be the adult," I tried to explain the repercussions of withdrawing so late in the term. Her response dripped with a victim's mentality: nothing in her life was her fault. I felt something shut down inside me as I realized that I no longer wanted to help Lori. I had no desire to talk to her, to spend time with her that could have been made available to other students. Did Lori notice my change in demeanor, my shift to a detached presence? "Since you have made the decision to withdraw," I responded in a clinical voice, "the grades that you receive will result in academic dismissal. I hope everything works out for you." My months of working with Lori ended with her departure from my office after a perfunctory good-bye.

Did I give up on Lori? Should I have worked harder with her? A friend who is a member of the faculty of my university's social work program always tells her students to remember that "You can't save every child." When did I decide that Lori was one of those that was not going to be saved, at least by me? What was my responsibility to Lori? Did I truly understand her concerns? Gadamer (1960/1975) is mindful of the importance of focusing on understanding, "for it is necessary to keep one's gaze fixed on the thing throughout all the distractions that the interpreter will constantly experience in the

process and which originate in himself" (p. 236). Did I lose my professional presence, becoming distracted by my frustrations and descending into a petulance that effectively built a wall between the two of us?

Handle with Care

After a week's worth of my mug's drying, building a wall was not on my mind…but building the mug's handle was. After allowing the mug to dry to a leather-hard stage (by covering it in plastic and sliding it into a special enclosed drying cart, positioning it in the dark recesses of the cabinet so that it could continue its metamorphosis in private) Tricia and I reconvened to attach the handle.

Taking in my wet hand a rounded lump of clay the size of a tennis ball, I slowly pulled the ball into the shape of a hot dog bun, then gently flattened two sides to produce a distinct "outside" and "inside" of the handle. After cutting away the excess length, I roughened the ends of the newly-formed handle in order to establish an irregular surface which would attach to the side of the mug. Repeating the roughening process on the mug where the handle would attach, I smeared a small amount of watery clay on the handle's ends and gently applied pressure as I pushed the handle into the scored area on the mug. Using my fingers, I smoothed out the rough edges to create a seamless connection between handle and bowl. My mug then returned to its storage spot in the "wet closet" (a

term I had learned described the transition spot for clay in the air-drying process).

Do advisors consciously desire to forge a link, a shared bond between advisor and student, much as I created the connection between mug and handle? At a recent advising workshop I attended, each participant identified, and shared with the group, a primary reason for serving as an advisor to first-year students. When my turn came, I said, "I advise because the connection I develop with students constantly reminds me why I chose higher education as my profession." The root of the word "connection" is built from "connect," which in turn evolved from the Latin *connectere*, meaning "to join together" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 208). Is the "joining together" of advisor and student a goal of the advisor, or is it the inevitable result of the advisor's ability?

The first year that students in the freshman class could have biologically been my offspring was a year of depression (overplayed, of course, for benefit of a running joke with colleagues). Since then, the chronological gap between the freshman student and myself has expanded from eighteen years to the current thirty-four—more than a quarter-century of choices, of experiences, of opinions and philosophies imbedding in and forming my psyche. As a result, the annual "mind-set" list from Beloit College has always been humbling, leaving me wondering if I could continue making connections to

students whose life is based on assumptive experiences that were pivotal in my own development. A sampling of Beloit College's list (http://www.beloit.edu/pubaff/releases/mindset_2007.html) illustrates the experiential abyss between my students and myself:

1. Richard Burton, Ricky Nelson, Orson Welles, and the U.S. Football League have always been dead.
2. "Ctrl + Alt + Del" is as basic as "ABC."
3. Paul Newman has always made salad dressing.
4. Bert and Ernie are old enough to be their parents.
5. An automatic is a weapon, not a transmission.
6. They never heard Howard Cosell call a game on ABC.
7. There has always been some association between fried eggs and your brain.
8. Datsuns have never been made.
9. There has always been a screening test for AIDS.
10. Gas has always been unleaded.

When I am in an advising session, I sometimes worry that I can make a connection with a student that could be my grandchild. I often find solace in Gadamer's (1924/1975) admonition about the value of accumulated experiences: "The truth of experience always contains an orientation toward new experience. That is why a person who is called 'experienced' has become such not only through experiences, but is also open to new experiences" (p. 319). How is my advising affected—either positively or negatively—by my collective experiences? Am I able to appreciate—to remember—the traumatic experiences associated with my own inaugural college year?

For many freshmen, the first year is very much an act of adaptation, a negotiation of the fine lines between independence and dependence, academic expectations and social demands, fear of the

unknown and a hunger for the unexpected. "Talented advisors and teachers know to achieve [a] delicate balance between support and challenge," write Levitz and Noel (1989). "They reassure students that feelings of uncertainty are typical, and that the college years provide an unparalleled opportunity to explore interests and options" (p. 73). Levitz and Noel (1989) also emphasize the importance of helping students to make connections to their new environment:

> Newly arrived freshmen encounter unfamiliar people and confusing systems. It is vital to help them move from feeling like outsiders to feeling personally involved in the life of the college, connected to the new environment. The single most important step in establishing this connection is to ensure that every freshman feels attached to some person at the institution . . . All freshmen should have the sense that someone at the institution knows them personally and cares about their academic and personal well-being. (p. 71)

However, making connections to students is not a universal occurrence, a spontaneous synergy realized simply because two individuals have been brought together in an artificial encounter labeled as an advising relationship. What is the experience of the advisor when no sort of feasible connection—emotionally, psychologically, or conversationally—can be forged with a student?

Tim speaks of his frustration as he had tried virtually every approach to engage Eva, one of his students, in some sort of meaningful discussion, ultimately admitting that "I was angry with her for not following through on some things that she said she would do, and I was just viewing her as irresponsible and I was putting her

over in that category." In recalling his feelings about the closure of the advising relationship with Eva, he says, "It was sad, and also very frustrating, that in spite of all my efforts to help her . . . this had virtually no impact on her staying in school."

Tim admits that he may have been perceived as arrogant or patronizing because Eva was resistant to his inquiries. Was a connection ever made between Eva and Tim, or did the possibility disintegrate in response to Eva's emotional upheaval and Tim's impatience? Frost (1991), terming freshmen students as "students in transition" (p. 40), reminds advisors to be acutely aware of the importance of the transition period, a time span of approximately six months. "During transition, students make decisions that can profoundly affect the patterns of their lives. They seek support from advisors as they explore future directions" (p. 40). Was Eva working through such a transitional phase, a period made more stressful by her inability to connect with Tim as her advisor?

Surviving the First Firing

Periods of transition also existed in my engagement with ceramics as I slowly moved the clay from ignominious lump to recognizable artifact. The next step was bisqueing, a process requiring that the clay form be heated in an electric kiln to a temperature of at least 1600 degrees for about four to six hours.

"Are you nervous?" Tricia asked as she placed my mug on a lower shelf of the kiln. Yes, I was unsettled about the status of my mug. I had seen pieces die in the kiln, often the result of air bubbles in the clay or the clay's rejection of a patching job. My connection to my coffee mug was as pronounced as the day I finished building it, and I fervently hoped to open the kiln's lid six hours later and find it intact.

When the bisqueing cycle was completed and the kiln had cooled, Tricia propped open the lid of the kiln. She peered in, turned and smiled, saying, "I do believe you have a coffee mug." Reaching in and pulling it out, she handed my mug to me, its texture now somewhat granular, its surface the color of parchment. I saw how my inexperience with clay had been permanently baked in: the indentation where my thumb slipped as I moved the mug from the pottery wheel, the rough molding I had attempted in creating an ergonomically-appropriate handle. These items I dismissed, however, for most important to me was my mug's survival of another stage of the process.

Etymologically, the word "survive" offers insight into the experiences of a student. Grafted from the Latin *super*—"over, beyond"—and *vivere*—"to live" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 1097)—the root history of "survive" connotes a movement away from a current existence and towards another life. In fact, this phase has a

particular label in the development theories that focus on first-year college students: separation, a period in which "students disassociate from their former communities of family, high school, and residence [and] move toward adulthood" (Frost, 1991, p. 42).

During the separation phase, students encounter daily crises that disrupt their lives, crises that often make their way into an advising session. "The freshman year is taking a real toll of students' physical and mental health," observes Bartlett (2002), noting an increase in students' self-reporting during their freshman year of increased emotional health problems, a decline in physical health, more depression, and increasing boredom in class. Activities taken for granted often become insurmountable in the context of newly-found independence.

I recall clearly the conversation with Emily after her first day of classes her freshman year. I was talking informally to another student in my office when Emily appeared at my door, obviously distressed. Seeing the tears on her cheeks, I immediately asked, "Emily, what's wrong?" I knew that her parents had just divorced, and I was concerned that the residual impact of their action was revealing itself. The real issue, however, exploded in a torrent of tears: "I don't know how to operate the washers and dryers, and I need clothes for tomorrow!" For Emily, the recurrence of clean clothing had been taken for granted during her pre-college years.

Now, separated from the normal routines of home, Emily had construed the task of doing her laundry into a problem tantamount to expulsion.

Institutionally, responsibility for a first-year student's survival—read most often as a student's successful retention in subsequent semesters—is often placed squarely in the lap of the advisor. If students "lack academic focus, are unprepared for certain courses . . . or are uncertain about their major or course of study . . . it is the institution's academic advising program that is assigned frontline responsibility for coordinating campus-wide efforts to address these needs" (Hart, 1995, p. 75). As an academic advisor, I am expected to know the details of dozens of different undergraduate majors and minors in order to give students a sense of direction as they prepare to select a program of study. The task is somewhat daunting:

> First-year students, who may have a somewhat limited vision of their options due to inexperience, immaturity, or parochialism, can benefit enormously from advice that introduces them to a full range of academic choices. Students should probably be encouraged to be more exploratory, to test themselves in a variety of disciplines, and to evaluate their interests and talent in new areas more often. (Berdahl, 1995, p. 8)

Can an advisor feel overwhelmed by the breadth of responsibilities that Berdahl identifies? What is the experience of "running out of answers," only to see the student waiting expectantly for the elusive, enlightening observation delivered by the advisor? Often, comfort comes in a retreat to familiar territory: "lecturettes" on

responsibility, choice, self-confidence, or any of countless other topics. Shor and Freire (1987) observe that "The verbal density of an overtrained intellectual can easily silence the verbal expression of undertrained students" (p. 145). If I fade back to the safety of generic advice-giving, do I speak to students as if I were speaking to an adult with a similar accumulation of experiences and knowledge? Am I hurting a student's chances of survival if I assume there exists the ability to assimilate the concepts offered by multiple options?

Creating the External

For a professional potter, the multiple options available for surface pattern and decoration are very exciting: "From subtle earth colors to the vivid and brash, from print to paint, from rough to smooth, we can have whatever we want" (Connell, 2002, p. 7). I moved from firing to aesthetics as I considered my options for finishing the surface of my mug.

"Next, you need to pick out a glaze," Tricia directed. She handed me an assortment of test tiles—small irregularly-shaped squares of pottery created specifically to illustrate various glaze tones and textures. I felt like I had reversed roles with my first-year advisees: I became the overwhelmed new student struggling to comprehend the many choices provided by my advisor (a role now played by Tricia in my excursion into pottery). I finally selected a mottled blue glaze with flecks of ochre and green. "Remember that

glaze ultimately makes its own decisions on how it will look," Tricia explained. "Each combination of clay, glaze, and firing temperature results in an often unexpected outcome."

Donning vinyl gloves, I headed to the glazing sink for instructions. "You have to move quickly," Tricia admonished. "Too much glaze in one place will cause bubbling, or the weight will result in the glaze sliding to the kiln floor. Too little glaze creates an uneven appearance." She directed me to a covered container that held the glaze. Tricia reminded me that the color of the glaze appears only after the heat interacts with the chemicals in the glaze; "as a result, when you're combining glazes on a pot or bowl, only your mind's eye has an idea of what it will look like."

Another self-generated supposition about ceramics—that glazing is easy and under the control of the artist—was summarily exploded when I began the application process. Glaze is not painted on; it is poured on. The process must be very quick, because the object needs to be covered in a consistent thickness. After my first pouring, I discovered that I had missed sections of the handle. When I applied additional glaze to rectify that problem, my inexperience with manipulation of the process resulted in other sections of the mug being "double-glazed." I kept re-applying glaze, trying to achieve a semblance of balance, each re-application reminding me that I was, in fact, born with ten thumbs. Casting a critical eye on my progress,

Tricia said, "I think you need to stop there." Noting that the glaze was uneven, she explained, "Most likely the excess glaze will burn off in the kiln. Otherwise, it may harden on the side of the mug like a barnacle on the bottom of a ship." Knowing what I was thinking, she said, "Yes, that could also ruin the mug, because glaze deposits usually can't be removed."

Taking the mug from my hands, she placed it in the kiln, "on the bottom level, by itself, just in case the glaze runs." Tricia continued filling the kiln, inserting kiln shelves to allow her bowls and platters to be stacked above my mug. Closing the kiln's lid, she turned on the burners, and the firing process was initiated. "Tomorrow, we'll see if you're successful or not," she said.

The term "glaze" has an interesting etymological history. Receding from the French *glasen* ("to fit with glass"), the word ultimately finds its birth in the Indo-European *gel-/ghel-,* a color word that is the root of grey, blue, green, and yellow (Barnhart, 1988, p. 435). In ceramics, the root color word is most applicable, for glazes provide the potter with an infinite hue of colors and shadings. In advising, the French phrase is a more apt description of the experience of working with students in distress, students who "fit themselves with glass," developing a clear protective covering over themselves that is often impenetrable to the advisor.

What is the experience of working with students who bring to campus issues that adversely affect their ability to meet the academic or social challenges of a modern university? According to Habley (1995),

> There has been a substantial increase in psychological disturbance among college students, and waiting lists for treatment in college counseling centers are a sign of the times. There are more students entering college today suffering from serious emotional distress, including self-destructive behavior, violence against others, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, as well as victimization because of date and acquaintance rape, courtship violence, family or spouse abuse, and family and alcohol abuse . . . physical health problems are also on the increase, including eating disorders, sexually transmitted diseases and, of course, AIDS. This means that academic advisors must be aware of signs of mental and physical health problems and be prepared to make appropriate referrals. (p. 10)

Being aware of psychological crises often can be managed by a clinical, objective observation of established indicators. However, dealing with students' personal issues often causes advisors trepidation if they feel they are "crossing the line" into counseling.

Why would an advisor hesitate to "counsel" a student? Counseling is "an activity engaged in deliberately, with a clear intention and operating according to a clearly defined set of rules" (Woolfe, 1997, p. 4). Advising has the same parameters: deliberate engagement (students are assigned an advisor); clear intention (course selection, academic progress); clearly defined rules (institutional policies). The two approaches to student engagement veer significantly when personal issues are involved, because

counseling, conducted by individuals trained in intervention techniques, "involves a professional relationship in which counselors and clients jointly participate in problem resolution" (Nugent, 1994, p. 5) to "gain self understanding . . . in order to solve problems more effectively and resolve conflicts in everyday living" (p. 5).

What happens, then, if the advisor has no training in dealing with such issues and cannot recognize the "warning signals?" What is the outcome if an advisor is overwhelmed by the intensity of the student's situation and feels inadequate to assist? Is the advisor's response ultimately destructive if the student's situation promotes such a strong negative reaction that the advisor cannot see past personal connotations—or condemnation? Rogers (1969) clearly outlines the results of inadequate intervention as seen by the student: "When I try to share some feeling aspect of myself which is private, precious, and tentative, and when this communication is met by evaluation, by reassurance, by denial, by distortion of my meaning, I have very strongly the reaction, 'Oh, what's the use!'" (p. 227).

My episode with Anna still haunts me, a vivid reminder of my inability to break through her glass shell. Anna had a checkered college history, attending two other institutions before arriving at my campus, then withdrawing twice before she could finish a semester. Because of her movement from college to college, she still was technically a freshman, having earned only fifteen credits. She

arrived in my office on the verge of a third withdrawal, the third meeting in as many weeks in an attempt to get her academic life back on track. Anna represented a prime example of what I called the "lacquering" of students. The root of the word lacquer is the French *lacre* (Barnhart, 1988, p. 572), meaning "sealing wax," and that is what I felt we often did in college: sealing the students under layers of external expectations without checking to see first if the foundation was firm.

After we discussed procedural options—which courses to drop, which to keep, how to best maintain an adequate grade point average—Anna broke visual connection with me and said, almost in a whisper, "I tried to commit suicide last night, but I didn't cut deep enough." Slowly and hesitantly, she extended her wrists, and I saw the bandages that covered what I knew were gashes. "My parents don't know; I didn't want them to." She looked at me, her face the personification of Merleau-Ponty's (1942/1963) description: "the center of human expression, the transparent envelope of the attitudes and desires of others, the place of manifestation, the barely material support for a multitude of intentions" (p. 167). Her face reflected the depth of despair she felt, the effort she was making to struggle to the surface.

I hesitated in my response. I had never dealt with a suicidal student before. My experience had been academic (studying the

causes) and dismissive (suicide as the ultimate act of self-absorption). Now, in my office was a young woman who translated the abstract into the real. In nano-seconds, I raced through my accumulated knowledge of suicide in young people, frantically searching for the right response that would provide comfort, that would show concern, that would show I had an understanding of Anna's troubles. In recalling Covey's (1989) warnings about inadequate listening and understanding, I felt that Anna herself was speaking to me:

> Unless I open up with you, unless you understand me and my unique situation and feelings, you won't know how to advise or counsel me. What you say is good and fine, but it doesn't quite pertain to me.
>
> You may say you care about and appreciate me. I desperately want to believe that. But how can you appreciate me when you don't even understand me? All I have are your words, and I can't trust words. (p. 238)

Words are what I offered: words of solace, of compassion, of encouragement, of support. I desperately tried to show Anna that I was concerned. Did my desperation cloud my attempts? Did I provide Anna any help? Later that week she withdrew from all but one of her classes; by the end of the semester, she had failed her remaining class, an action resulting in academic dismissal. On the day that dismissal appeals were due (the submittal of which possibly would have allowed Anna to return to classes the next semester) I received a voice mail message from Anna: "Please call me. I'm on my way to work, but I really want to come back. I need your help." I

immediately returned the call, only to receive a curt reply at her home that Anna was gone and "Yes, I guess I can take a message." Anna never called back; I tried to call on two separate occasions and sent a hand-written note, but I did not hear from her again. I often find myself worrying about her, wondering if I could have done more, or if I had been a counterproductive influence, not listening closely enough or understanding completely enough, sending her to her own inner world, "a world that becomes more and more bizarre . . . the only place they can live" (Rogers, 1969, p. 227).

The greatest majority of my students have "completed the cycle" of undergraduate education, successfully making the transition from first-year to second-year student, ultimately completing their degrees, introducing me to their parents at the university's commencement ceremony. Anna was—and continues to be—"unfinished business."

The Unveiling

As Tricia and I drove to the university's kiln shed the following evening, my mind raced. I knew that tonight's opening of the kiln potentially would finish the pottery cycle for me, because I would retrieve from the heat a useable utilitarian vessel. Still, thoughts of rationalization bantered with each other for the forward position in my brain, each offering an adequate reason for what I was sure would

be a dismal failure: "It's my first time;" "I can't control all the processes;" "I've no pretensions about being a potter."

Entering the building, Tricia looked at me and said, "You really ARE nervous about this, aren't you?" Trying to be nonchalant, I made a joke about the whole experience, while deep inside I fervently hoped that my mug would be a success. Tricia propped the lid on the kiln, allowing the last vestiges of heat to escape. She removed her pieces—an assortment of intricately carved platters and serving bowls—then stepped back, saying, "It's your mug. You should have the first look." Leaning over the lip of the kiln, I removed the last remaining kiln shelf, the final obstruction to viewing the fate of my mug.

Sitting in the half-darkness of the kiln's lowest level, my mug showed no initial signs of stress from the firing process. No pools of color had spread around the mug's base, indicating that the glaze was stable. The handle was still attached, so I had successfully scored each piece and applied enough slip to cement the sections together. I leaned into the kiln and gently retrieved the mug with both hands, gingerly shifting it from palm to palm in response to an unexpected level of heat retention.

Setting the mug on a work table, I surveyed my handiwork with a curious mixture of pride, awe, and relief. Objectively, I knew that my mug would never win any awards: the sides were much too thick, the handle too aggressive, the mug's overall weight prohibiting its

comfortable use as a functional vessel. These deficiencies were quickly dismissed, however, as I considered the object before me. What did I see? A confirmation of the premise that "Clay is one of those few natural materials that have no perceptible value of their own in an undeveloped state yet can be transformed into objects of beauty" (Chappell, 1991, p. 22). In the firing process, the glaze had transformed itself from a flat, dull tan to a mottled blue reminiscent of the evening sky as summer storm clouds approach. The mug's rim and handle edges were tinged in a greenish gold, the result of the glaze not adhering to the edges, yet counterbalancing the light and dark shadings of blue. The sandpaper texture of the bisquing process had disappeared, incorporated into the leavening characteristics of the glaze, creating a mug smooth to the touch, a mug that softly reflected light from its surface. On its base the mug's heritage was apparent: rough clay spoke to the early stages of its creation, while my initials and date of firing—"JML 2002"—identified the date of a very personal interaction of human and clay.

Repeating the Process

"Now I think you understand your metaphor," said Tricia, smiling as she observed my fascination with the outcome of my work. Yes, I had a much deeper understanding of the process of clay building; however, I was shocked by my visceral reaction. I knew that I did not want to experience this particular creative process again. My

feelings were equal parts pride—in the outcome and in my determination to see the process through to the end—and relief—because I knew that one foray into the world of clay was more than enough for me.

Why did I feel that way? Was it a fear of failure, of having to start all over again? Was it impatience, wanting to spend my time on other tasks? Do advisors experience such intolerance with their students? Is there ever a time when advisors realize that they simply do not want to advise anymore? Perhaps they feel that the potential of inadequate advising possibly contributing to a student's decision to withdraw from college (Frost, 1991) is a responsibility they no longer wish to shoulder. Perhaps, too, advisors are simply tired: tired of the emotional turmoil, the commitment, the depth of conflict that students often bring to campus. Often the issue of time pulls advisors away, as they take on other teaching or administrative duties and experience feelings of frustration, or even anger, over their increased responsibilities.

I faced this particular dilemma during a fall term in which my roster of advisees capped at 115. I was teaching two freshman orientation courses as well as a section of English composition while I juggled new administrative responsibilities. Was it my imagination, or were the students in my freshman orientation seminars particularly demanding, noticeably lazy, and totally devoid of self-discipline? In

order to stem the tide of my growing frustration, I veered from my usual approach of clearing my calendar for three weeks in order to advise students on an individual basis; instead, I established group advising sessions and held no individual meetings unless absolutely necessary.

As I sat in my office during the first advising meeting, waiting for students to appear, I engaged in a tumultuous battle with myself—a battle of equal parts guilt, rationalization, and avoidance. In previous semesters, I always had offered each student private advising time, and now I felt I was shortchanging these students at a particularly stressful time during the semester. On the other hand, I rationalized that the combined workload of students and administrative duties was inordinately heavy, that students were not really interested in advising, that all they really wanted from me was a signature on their course request card. In a vain attempt to quell the fray inside my head, I turned to answering e-mails until my first advisee appeared.

During that particular semester, I actually met with about 50% of the students under my charge—noticeably lower than an average of 85%-90% in previous semesters. Was I a good advisor to those students who attended the open meetings? What about the students who never appeared? I wondered if I had avoided my responsibilities as I reviewed the list of students academically dismissed at the end of

that semester, noting the names of those who were assigned to me. Would Darryl have had a better chance at success in his classes if I had been more readily available? When I told Kara to come to an open meeting for advising (which she did not do) was she having personal problems too intense to be discussed in a "public" session, issues that resulted in her poor academic performance and her ultimate dismissal? I will never know. However, that was the last semester that I conducted group advising meetings.

Returning to the Clay

I keep my mug in a prominent position on my desk, often glancing at it as I write. Since its completion a few months ago, I have softened on my determined stance to "never touch clay again," thinking that perhaps, after I complete my dissertation, I will draw on my rudimentary skills and tackle building a bowl or vase.

I also have softened on my advising approach, returning to individual conferences, offering students private time with me. Some truly value the opportunity; for others it is a perfunctory visit with a campus administrator. Still, I feel like a better advisor having made my time available, freely and without reservation.

As I ponder the mug, its glaze casting a soft glow in the late afternoon sun, I find myself thinking of commencement at my university. As the event's coordinator, I attend every ceremony to assure that the service runs smoothly. A side benefit is that I often

see students whom I had advised years before, first-year students who had struggled with their own personal issues of adjustment, now striding confidently across the stage to receive their diploma and a hearty handshake from their college dean. It is at this point, too, that I remind myself that advising relationships, while intense, are transient in nature, brief encounters that are

> short periods of time when people are so close to one another that they can almost hear the other's heart beat, sense the other's thoughts and feel the other's joy and pain. Each person "encounters" the other in a vitalizing way—exposing facets of himself (beliefs, experiences, feelings) not ordinarily exposed—and is heard and seen and understood by the other. (Coleman & Edwards, 1979, p. 7)

Still, I know that for some of these students our connection was more than passing; for them, I served as parent, friend, or "reality check" at a time when they needed someone to be interested in their problems and issues. I smile at some, hug others, and watch as they depart to a circle of ebullient friends and family.

Returning to the present, I look at my mug, smiling as I recall the process of its building. I realize that I am looking forward to the opportunity to "try my hand" at clay-building, just as I am looking forward to meeting my new roster of advisees as part of the entering class of first-year students that will arrive in the fall.

The Reciprocity of Art: A Retrieval of Personhood

John Ruskin, the prolific late nineteenth-century British writer and observer of the world of art and architecture, offers his perception of art's unique ability to give and receive:

> I do not say therefore that the art is greatest which gives most pleasure, because perhaps there is some art whose end it is to teach and not to please. I do not say the art is greatest which teaches the most, because perhaps there is some art whose end it is to please and not to teach. I do not say that the art is greatest which imitates best, because perhaps there is some art whose end it is to create and not to imitate. But I say that the art is greatest which conveys to the mind of the spectator, by any means whatsoever, the greatest number of the greatest ideas, and I can perceive an idea great in proportion as it is received by a higher faculty of the mind, and as it more fully occupies, and in occupying, exercises, and exalts, the faculty by which it is received. (in Seldes, 1985, p. 359)

Ruskin speaks of the reciprocal nature of art, the giving of ideas embodied in the work of the artist, to the audience. A potter, through the masterful use of clay and glaze, interprets specific ideas and presents them in a three-dimensional form to be pondered by all who view the work. This reciprocal process, this "moving backward and forward" (as defined by the root word of "reciprocal," the Latin *reciprocus* [Barnhart, 1988, p. 895]) is a hallmark of art and its value to humankind.

A "moving backward and forward" also may be found in the advising relationship, in the creation of value for both the student and the advisor. A very personal pleasure is often derived from watching a student tackle the responsibilities of college and adulthood, just as I

experienced an intense pleasure from successfully forming a mug from a ball of clay. As an example of a particularly gratifying advising experience, Jodie relates the story of Mary, one of her advisees:

> I remember Mary—that's her baby's picture on the door there—and that was the situation with her. . . She struggled, and we worked through it, and then she was academically dismissed. Then she came back, and then she worked here in our office so I could have constant contact with her, and then she went through a class in communications law, and she was scared to death that she was going to fail it, so we worked through it, and I read the test to her, and we studied together. It was so much more than just an advising session. And then she got pregnant in her senior year, and the bottom line was, watching her walk across the stage and knowing that you had some kind of influence in what she did. And I think that's the best part about advising, is watching someone even from their freshman year . . . So the best thing is working with them, making a plan, and having them graduate. That's very, very rewarding.

Why was it rewarding for Jodie to feel that she had contributed personally to Mary's attainment of specific goals in the face of particularly daunting challenges? Is the feeling of accomplishment the same that I felt when I saw my mug for the first time, or when I encounter former students who still remember me as their freshman advisor? Parini (2002) writes, "Even with students, I'm aware that my role in their lives is often not over. The number of them who stay in touch after graduation always surprises me" (p. B 20). Is it this type of satisfaction, of connection, that continues to engage me in advising? Perhaps it is because "All human acts and all human creations constitute a single drama, and in this sense we are all saved or lost together. Our life is essentially universal" (Merleau-Ponty,

1964, p. 8). Does such a universality of connection continue unbroken from advisor to student?

In the Eye of the Beholder: The Impact of Art and Advising

Once a piece of clay has been molded, glazed, and fired, it goes on to a life of utility or display. As a functional piece, a ceramic item—be it a bowl, platter, plate, or pitcher—shares its beauty as part of day-to-day existence and utilization. Pottery designed for display becomes an object for consideration and contemplation for all who view it, the exemplification of the adage, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." No matter the ultimate destination of a piece of pottery, the building process is complete.

In advising, however, there is never a finite "finishing point." Students build on the experiences of the first year until ultimately they graduate or, for students like Anna and Lori, they veer towards an unexpected detour. Will the advisor ever see the outcome? In advising, is there ever "the end of the fire?" Perhaps not. But with each student, advisors find new opportunities for engagement, for communication, for understanding—both of the student and of the advisor's inner self. This constant quest for understanding is important, according to Merleau-Ponty (1962), because

> Our view of man will remain superficial so long as we fail to go back to the origin, so long as we fail to find, beneath the chatter of words, the primordial silence, and as long as we do not describe the action which breaks this silence. The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world. (p. 183)

To guide me in my search for the origin, the essence of advising hidden somewhere beneath the everydayness of the act, I turn to the writings of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer. Their search for that which lies beneath the "primordial silence" offers a solid grounding from which I may dig deeper in search of the language that "describes those aspects of experience which are given in the experience, but which are not reducible to any single experience" (Clifton, 1963, p. 9).

CHAPTER THREE:

PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS

For many artists, the act of creating offers a fulfillment that reaches beyond the actual process and ultimate results. Richards (1962) writes eloquently of this aspect of clay-building:

> I develop a sense of life, of the world of earth, air, fire, and water . . . which could be developed in no other way. And if it is life I am fostering, I must maintain a kind of dialogue with the clay, listening, serving, interpreting as well as mastering. The union of our wills, like a marriage, it is a beautiful act, the act of centering and turning a pot on the potter's wheel . . . the give-and-take in the forming of a pot out of slabs, out of raw shards, out of coils; the union of natural intelligences: the intelligence of the clay, my intelligence, the intelligence of the tools, the intelligence of the fire. (p. 15)

If the essence of working as a potter is comprehended more deeply by embracing the experience beyond the manipulation of clay, so, too, can the experience of advising first-year college students be better understood beyond metaphor and personal reflection.

At its core level, the experience of advising is first established in a two-way dialogue between advisor and student. However, advising is much more than dialogue. Advising transcends the mechanics of language and speech, embracing the unspoken nuance, the shadowed glance, the message behind the words. As a result, the investigation into what may exist beyond dialogue requires more than introspective thoughts and writing. My decision to explore the lived experience of advising first-year college students has directed me toward the concept of human science research which, according to van Manen

(1990), "studies 'persons,' or beings that have 'consciousness' and that 'act purposefully' in and on the world by creating objects of 'meaning' that are 'expressions' of how human beings exist in the world" (p. 4). The methodology favored in human science research is analysis based on the tenets of phenomenology, "since the subject matter of phenomenological research is always the structures of meaning of the lived human world" (van Manen, 1990, p. 11).

Such an inquiry invites the consideration and counsel of a trio of philosophers whose writings I use to provide grounding for my study: Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Heidegger explores the concept of phenomenology as a methodology through which that which is hidden may be seen; Merleau-Ponty theorizes about the body as the center of meaning; Gadamer discusses language and conversation as the foundation of human existence. Each philosopher's view offers a deeper insight into the lived experience of academic advising and into hermeneutic phenomenology in general.

This chapter outlines the philosophical underpinnings of my research through an investigation of meanings found within the writings of the three phenomenological scholars cited. In addition, the methodology used to conduct the study is described in order to confirm the applicability of hermeneutic phenomenology as an appropriate avenue by which I may bring "into nearness that which

tends to be obscure, that which tends to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude of everyday life" (van Manen, 1990, p. 57). Finally, I describe my plans for the execution of my study.

Heidegger: "To the Things Themselves!"

For Heidegger (1927/1962), the interrelationship of ontology and phenomenology is undisputable:

> Phenomenology is our way of access to what is to be the theme of ontology, and it is our way of giving it demonstrative precision. *Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible*. . . 'Behind' the phenomena of phenomenology there is essentially nothing else; on the other hand, what is to become a phenomenon can be hidden. And just because the phenomena are proximally and for the most part *not* given, there is need for phenomenology. Covered-up-ness is the counter-concept to 'phenomenon.' (p. 60)

This synergy of ontology and phenomenology is introduced in Heidegger's (1927/1962) *Being and Time* as the foundation of "a new way of seeing" (Moran, 2000, p. 228), the basic premise for a set of philosophical explorations that extend far beyond the phenomenological reduction of Edmund Husserl (1900/1970).

Moran (2000) asserts that Heidegger looks to phenomenology "as the proper mode of access to the phenomena of concrete human life . . . a way of thinking about human nature that remained faithful to the historical, lived, practical nature of human experience" (pp. 227-228). So multi-layered is Heidegger's exploration into the deeper, richer applications of phenomenology that Gadamer (1976) observes, "Heidegger's transcendental analysis of everydayness did justice to the

experience of real life and to the inner decisions that are part of the leading of each personal life" (p. 140).

What particular influence does Heidegger bring to my use of hermeneutic phenomenology in this study? Is the experience of advising concealed "so extensively that it becomes forgotten and no question arises about it or its meaning"? (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 59). If so, an exploration of Heidegger's philosophy offers deeper insights into the phenomenon of advising, revealing additional meanings that "must likewise show themselves with the kind of access which genuinely belongs to them" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 61).

Politics Becomes Philosophy Becomes Politics

At this juncture, however, I must step back and address a nagging problem I am experiencing with Heidegger the man, a controversy that begs my attention and that must be addressed before I can proceed with any level of comfort in discussing Heideggerian principles of phenomenology. The situation in question is Heidegger's alignment with the Nazi Party in Germany. How can I reconcile his public commitment to Nazism, his position as "the only major thinker to opt for Nazism, the main example of absolute evil in our time—possibly of any time" (Margolis & Rockmore, in Farias, 1989, p. ix) with a philosophy that has had such a profound influence on my selected methodology?

Heidegger's involvement in the Nazi Party continues to be controversial, especially since before his death Heidegger never publicly recanted his membership, offering only a rationale of action based on the contemporary situation in which he found himself. In fact, Heidegger, in his later years, reminded those who found themselves in the conflict of "admiring his philosophy and detesting his politics" (Safranski, 1998, p. 228) that an understanding of context must precede judgment:

> Your conflict remains unresolvable . . . so long as you are viewing National Socialism solely in retrospect from today and judging it with regard to what gradually came to light after 1934. At the beginning of the 1930s the class differences in our nation had become intolerable for any German with a sense of social responsibility . . . The confusion stemming from these circumstances, which today's generation can no longer even imagine, also spread to the universities. (Safranski, 1998, p. 228).

What, then, attracted Heidegger to the tenets of the National Socialist Party, a political organization that has been described as both a party for the masses and a party built upon an ideological protest against the policies of the administration of the post-World War I Weimar Republic (Dulffer, 1996, p. 9)? More importantly, what did the Nazi Party, which grew from its National Socialist base, espouse in its political theories that influenced Heidegger's decision to become an active Party member? And finally, how does Heidegger's connection to Nazism affect my interpretations of his philosophy as I engage in my research?

The controversy. Much has been written in defense of Heidegger's political proclivities. For example, Safranski (1998) maintains that Heidegger's Nazism was necessitated because "he had hoped it would bring about an equalization of social conflicts on the basis of a new sense of community. Moreover, a halt had to be called to the advance of communism" (p. 337). Margolis and Rockmore (in Farias, 1987/1989), in the preface to *Heidegger and Nazism*, further note that some scholars relegate Heidegger's political activities to nothing more than a surface and transitory response to his contemporary social/political climate, and cite those researchers who feel that "Heidegger's detractors are insufficiently aware of the entire body of his thought to criticize it" (p. x) in light of a brief political interlude. Meanwhile, other proponents of Heideggerian philosophy maintain "that the uninitiated, those whose philosophical being is not bound up with Heidegger in an essential way, cannot really measure the importance or full significance of Heidegger's work" (p. x). In other words, Heidegger's political connection to the Nazi Party is viewed as insignificant by some writers in light of his greater contribution to philosophical thinking.

Heidegger's public Nazism. Yet scholarly research has uncovered Heidegger's own writings that indicate his allegiance to Party ideals, especially during the period 1931-1937. According to Safranski (1998), Heidegger saw in the National Socialist revolution of

1933 events that "had electrified him philosophically; that he [had] discovered a fundamental metaphysical happening, a metaphysical revolution . . . that not only affected the life of the German nation but opened a new chapter in Western history" (p. 233). That year, writing as rector of the University at Freiberg in the student newspaper, Heidegger admonished students to view Hitler as the spirit of a true revolutionary: "Do not let principles and 'ideas' be the rules of your existence. The Fuhrer himself, and he alone, is the German reality of today, and of the future, and of its law" (Farias, 1987/1989, p. 118).

Safranski (1998) offers other instances of Heidegger's public commitment to Nazism, chronicled in the development of a draft of a code of honor for faculty at the University of Frieburg (a document approved by Heidegger in his position as rector) that stated the desire "to cleanse our ranks of inferior elements and thwart the forces of degeneracy in the future" (p. 253). This objective was a veiled goal that, according to Safranski, "for the Nazi revolution . . . meant primarily Jews and political opponents. Heidegger must have known this" (p. 253). Safranski (1998) further maintains that Heidegger, in his role as rector, engaged in "competition anti-Semitism, [which] was basically a refusal to accept the assimilation of the Jews" (p. 255), as illustrated in Heidegger's own words: "There is a pressing need for us to remember that we are faced with the choice of either bringing genuine autochthonous forces and educators into our German

spiritual life, or finally abandoning it to the growing Judaization in the wider and narrower sense" (p. 255). Safranski (1998) additionally notes that Heidegger displayed an aquiescence to the true face of Nazism: "The brutality of Nazi anti-Semitism [did not] deter him from the movement. He did not support its actions, but he accepted them" (p. 256). Ultimately, during the de-Nazification hearings held by the French in 1945, Heidegger posted a self-defense based on misguided politics. However, Safranski (1998) maintains that during these hearings, and for the rest of his life, Heidegger "showed no sense of guilt. But in fact neither did he feel any" (p. 337).

In *Heidegger and Nazism*, Farias (1987/1989) further offers compelling—and disturbing—evidence of Heidegger's level of commitment to Nazism, explaining, for example, that Heidegger's speeches and writings "distinctly contributed to the actual atmosphere created by Nazi propaganda that set the stage for the storm troopers' hooliganism in the first years of the 'movement' during the Weimar period and, above all, later, during Hitler's seizure of power" (p. 88). Farias (1987/1989) dismisses those who blunt the importance of Heidegger's Nazism, noting:

> All those studies that attempt to minimize Heidegger's compromise with National Socialism or those wanting to see a deeper and more 'metaphysical' meaning in Heidegger show signs of a systematic unawareness of the texts where Heidegger speaks to us about his Nazi faith, tied to the person of Adolf Hitler. (p. 117)

Did Heidegger ever even consider the Holocaust and its implications? According to Lang (1996),

> Insofar . . . as the act of "thinking" is a keystone in Heidegger's own philosophical architectonic, there seems no alternative here to a conclusion of active rejection . . . Heidegger does not deny that the Nazi genocide against the Jews did occur—only that having occurred, it does not warrant thinking (even about). (pp. 14-15)

Ultimately, Margolis and Rockmore (in Farias, 1987/1989) offer the most condemning observation of Heidegger, stating that "he must be seen to be what he always was: a convinced Nazi, a philosopher whose genuine interest in Nazism survived his apparent disillusionment with Hitler's particular form of National Socialism" (p. xv).

My Engagement with Heidegger

I am presented, then, with a conundrum regarding Heidegger and his Nazism. By utilizing a methodology based on his philosophy, am I discounting—or accepting by default—his Nazi sympathies? Should his political inclinations be considered in conjunction with his philosophical thought, or are the two realms separate and discrete entities? Is such a separation of thought even possible? If I disregard Heidegger and his theories of phenomenology because of my distaste for his political beliefs, am I then exhibiting hypocrisy in using a methodology built primarily on his writing? What are my true feelings about studying the works of an individual who allegedly accepted tacitly the developing horror that ultimately became Hitler's Germany?

This particular section of the dissertation was, by far, the most difficult to write, the subject of early morning clarity, late afternoon anger, and midnight confusion over the course of several weeks. In my first draft, as submitted for my dissertation proposal meeting, I had convinced myself to choose a middle course in my decision to explore Heidegger's philosophical thought as grounding for my research; in effect, I opted for a sort of academic neutrality. I rationalized that Heidegger was guilty of being a philosophical dreamer who mistakenly strayed into the political arena (Safranski, 1998), exhibiting an error in judgment based on a philosophical view of reality that did not coincide with the ultimate horrors of the Nazi regime. I repeatedly tried to convince myself that because Heidegger's clarity of thought regarding the phenomenological essence of human existence, and the celebratory nature of his premise that all human actions are worthy of exploration, preceded his affiliation with the Nazi Party, I could embrace the pre-Nazi Heidegger while condemning the Nazi Heidegger. His writings present fundamental tenets of phenomenology; "Therefore," I asked myself numerous times, "should these contributions provide a legitimate counterpoint to his political mistakes?"

Yes, I postulated, his contributions to philosophy—and specifically, to phenomenology—should counterbalance his political

stance. So, in my own mind, I gave Heidegger a way out. In my earlier draft, I wrote the following apologist response:

> Heidegger's engagement with Nazism was a sign of human frailty. I cannot discount his philosophic genius based on political decisions made within a context that I will never have any way of fully comprehending. As a result, the "middle ground" I have chosen is to focus on the early Heidegger: the man who preferred his cabin in Tonigberg to life in the city, who grappled with the true existence of Being, and who explored the depths of hermeneutic phenomenology to provide a foundation for the methodology that today I embrace.

I distinctly recall experiencing a feeling of relief as I entered the last words of the preceding paragraph into my laptop computer. I had dreaded dealing with the Heidegger issue, and now I thought I had it all tidily compartmentalized. As I wrote the remainder of Chapter Three, however, I kept returning to my section on Heidegger, acknowledging but resolutely denying my mounting feelings of distaste about what I had written.

During the proposal meeting with my dissertation committee, however, pointed questions about my stance—or lack of it—brought back squarely to the forefront my stated ambivalence on Heidegger's politics. I was admonished to look closely at my thoughts about Heidegger, to confront the internal tension that I had tried to write away with a polite dismissal of his connections to Nazism.

Now, almost a year after my proposal meeting, after further readings and the ensuing internal monologues that popped up at unexpected times during the day (and night), I can fully confront my

feelings about the inclusion of Heidegger in my research. Ultimately, all the rationalization, the academic neutrality, the repeated justifications do not hide a fundamental issue: I cannot accept Heidegger's Nazism. That he echoed, in his writings and speeches during the latter years of the 1930s, his support for the early ideals of Nazism cannot be discounted, nor can his refusal for the rest of his life to disavow his involvement. As I learned more about Heidegger the man beyond Heidegger the philosopher, I found repugnant the idea of using his writings as a foundation for my research. I wanted to base my methodology on the theories of Gadamer and Husserl, two philosophers well-known for their work in phenomenology. Even though I knew that Heidegger's writings had established the framework on which modern phenomenology had been based, I found myself detouring around his works, trying to establish a set of core principles for my methodology that would avoid Heidegger. Even though Gadamer (1976) applauds Heidegger as one of the most influential thinkers in phenomenology of the twentieth century, an influence that "has penetrated everywhere and works in the depths, often unrecognized, often barely provoking resistance"(p. 139), a contribution without which "nothing today is thinkable without it" (p. 139), I continued to search for a way to extract Heidegger from my discussion on methodology—and ultimately found his contributions to be so pervasive as to render my efforts at exclusion futile.

As a result, Heidegger's inclusion in my research is out of disciplinary necessity. Had I been able to find a feasible way to "write around" Heidegger, I would gladly have done so. However, as Gadamer has noted, Heidegger's influence in phenomenology is so pervasive that to engage in phenomenological inquiry without a discussion of Heidegger would render my research inadequate and incomplete.

Therefore, I participate in my own conversation with Heidegger throughout my writings but, in doing so, I now understand the implications of Heidegger's (1927/1962) assertion that "the meaning of phenomenological description lies in interpretation" (p. 61). Interpretation, as an act of searching for a meaning, is based on the experiences and biases of the one searching and, as such, is inherently biased in nature. Interpretation thus may uncover only part of a phenomenon, for "Even in the concrete work of phenomenology itself there lurks the possibility that what has primordially been 'within our grasp' may become so hardened that we can no longer grasp it" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 61). Heidegger chose not to grasp the horrors of the Nazi Party and the Holocaust. In making the visible invisible, Heidegger allowed, in his own mind, these phenomena to be "buried over" (p. 36), leading Lang (1996) to observe that "Heidegger *refused* to think about the Holocaust, let alone to think it, with the refusal itself being thought" (p. 15).

Now, as I embark on further discussion of Heidegger's philosophies, I do so with a clearer understanding why his theories as a philosopher must be included in my research. I also accept my feelings about the actions of Heidegger the man—that his embracing of Nazism and his subsequent lack of disavowal of his beliefs are actions that I simply cannot condone as another member of the human race.

Having written my way through my issues regarding Heidegger and Nazism, I now turn to an exploration of his theories of and contributions to phenomenology.

Showing Itself in Itself

According to Heidegger (1927/1962), the term "phenomenology" is formed from the Greek roots of the words "phenomenon" ("to show itself") and "logos" ("discourse"). Thus, "We must keep in mind," writes Heidegger (1927/1962), "that the expression phenomenon signifies that which shows itself in itself, the manifest" (p. 50). He further interprets logos as "apophantical [declarative] discourse" (p. 58). Thus, phenomenology may be defined as "that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (p. 58).

Ultimately, Heidegger (1927/1962) poses the fundamental question regarding phenomenology:

> What is it that phenomenology is to 'let us see'? What is it that must be called a 'phenomenon' in a distinctive sense? What is

> it that by its very essence is necessarily the theme whenever we exhibit something explicitly? Manifestly, it is something that proximally and for the most part does not show itself at all: it is something that lies hidden, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground. (p. 59)

Heidegger speaks of the essence as the core of "explicit exhibition." Etymologically, "essence" connotes a fundamental existence through its roots in the Latin *essentia* ("being") and its cognate relationship with the Greek *esti* ("to be") (Barnhart, 1988, p. 344). How, then, is the essence of human experience discovered?

<u>The Value of Phenomenological Questioning</u>

The phenomenological question plays an integral role in Heidegger's exploration of the concept of Being, or Dasein—"this entity which each of us is himself [*sic*] and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 27):

> Being, as that which is asked about, must be exhibited in a way of its own, essentially different from the way in which entities are discovered. Accordingly, what is to be found out by the asking—the meaning of Being—also demands that it be conceived in a way of its own, essentially contrasting with the concepts in which entities acquire their determinate signification.

Heidegger (1927/1962), then, directs those engaged in phenomenological research to search beyond the external and established appearance of an entity. To do this, one must ask; i.e., question in such a way that these entities will, "on their part, have become accessible as they are in themselves" (p. 26).

Continued inquiry into the nature of Being leads Heidegger toward his ultimate goal of explaining Dasein: the human in its existing state, distinguished in its Being from other entities "by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 32). Phenomenological questioning also allows Heidegger to grapple with the basic premise of "Being-in-the-world," "the formal existential expression for the Being of Dasein, which has Being-in-the-world as its essential state" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 80), a state of elemental presence in which Being resides.

What, then, constitutes the "is"-ness, the Being, of the individual advisors who engage in the lived experience of advising first-year college students? Through the writings of Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer, I further explore "that which lies hidden" in the essence of my selected phenomenon.

Merleau-Ponty: The Body and Human Experience

As Heidegger considers the search for essence to be an integral part of phenomenological inquiry, so, too, does Merleau-Ponty (1962), as stated in his premise that "Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it all problems amount to finding definitions of essences" (p. vii). However, Merleau-Ponty's search for the essence pivots, not exclusively on the question of Being, but on the fact that the world "is always 'already there' before reflection begins—as an inalienable presence" (p. vii); therefore, the focus of

phenomenology is "concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status" (p. vii).

"The experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us" (Merleau-Ponty, 1947, 1955/1964, p. 25). This moment is of utmost importance to phenomenological inquiry, for it is when the essence of the experience is pulled from its hitherto hidden place. In order to investigate perception as a component of advising first-year students further, I turn to Merleau-Ponty's discourse on perception as an indispensable tool in understanding the world, a world inexhaustible with meaning and content.

The Totality of Perception

The body, through the interplay of perception, knowledge, and meaning, plays a pivotal role in human experience. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), "The body is the vehicle of being in the world" (p. 82). The ability to perceive is a characteristic integral to human existence:

> Now there is indeed one human act which at one stroke cuts through all possible doubts to stand in the full light of truth: this act is perception, in the wide sense of knowledge of existences. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 40)

What is perception? As defined by Merleau-Ponty (1962), perception is "not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all

acts stand out, and is presupposed by them" (p. x). Perception is our personal presence at the moment of interplay between objects, values, and the creation of learning, "assisting at the birth of this knowledge, to make it as sensible as the sensible, to recover the consciousness of rationality" (Merleau-Ponty, 1947, 1955/1964, p. 25). Perception, then, offers a channel of erudition through which "we have learned to feel our body; we have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 206). Offering an interpretation of a potter's perception as an example of the totality of the experience, Richards (1962) observes, "I learn through my hands and my eyes and my skin what I could never learn through my brain" (p. 15).

What is the advisor's experience of using a body-focused perception in working with students? What, in fact, does "perception" really mean? Its original definition is found in the Latin word *percipere*, meaning "to obtain, gather, grasp with the mind," which in turn is based on the Latin roots of *per* ("thoroughly") and *capere* ("to grasp, take") (Barnhart, 1988, p. 775). Perception, then, is not limited to the mind but requires the entire body to "obtain, gather, grasp, and take" information. For most advisors working with freshmen, it usually is understood that "First-year college students are new to the college environment and often reluctant to acknowledge academic

difficulty or ask for assistance" (Hart, 1995, p. 77). As a result, an advisor must be able to perceive issues, problems, or questions that the student may not be willing to present for discussion. Does the breaking of eye contact mean that the conversation is approaching a sensitive subject? Does the hesitancy at the door suggest that there is more on a student's mind? Does a change in the tone and rhythm of a student's voice belie a hidden anger or sadness?

At times, the ability to perceive, fully and wholly, a student's situation will fail the advisor because of interruptions, distractions from other projects, or absorption with personal issues. The student who cannot adequately express in words the scope of a problem can speak in volumes through unstated signals, if only the advisor will listen with the whole body.

Janine was the type of student whose unspoken signals could easily be overlooked: a quiet, polite freshman who was easily overshadowed by more aggressive, more vocal students. The same ease of oversight was true for our advising sessions. Her contriteness made her easily dismissible, which was the route I took on a particularly frenetic morning during course registration. I asked her twice if she had anything else to say. Her shy "thank you" and quiet departure from my office allowed a quick shift to pressing administrative matters. However, as I prepared to draft the first of a series of memoranda, I realized that something about Janine's

demeanor troubled me. A pervasive awareness of Janine's polite non-existence slowly crept over me, a feeling that told me that something was buried beneath a seemingly placid exterior. I hurriedly left my office, hoping to catch up with her, finding her sitting alone in the courtyard adjacent to the student center.

When we had returned to my office, I said, "Janine, I sensed that you've not said everything that you wanted. Is there something happening that is difficult to discuss?" Forty-five minutes and many tears later, I learned that Janine had been harboring the fear that she might be pregnant. I made an appointment for her at the university's clinic; later that week, she called and thanked me, saying that her fears were unfounded. I wondered what route Janine would have taken if I had not noticed her subtle change in demeanor, if I had discounted the non-language signals my body provided.

Was the level of perception utilized in the episode with Janine anything extraordinary, or do all advisors have this capacity? Is bodily perception, in fact, an innate part of our own human-ness? To explain further the foundations for perception, Merleau-Ponty (1962) introduces the metaphor of a searchlight which can rotate on its axis to illuminate locales and objects all around it. Like the searchlight,

> The life of consciousness—cognitive life, the life of desire or perceptual life—is subtended by an "intentional arc" which projects round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation, or rather which results in our being situated in all these respects. It is

> this intentional arc which brings about the unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility. (p. 136)

Motility, then, is the act by which individuals are able to draw on a wide variety of experiences in order to enter into a state of perception. As a result, human perception is unique to each individual's accumulated experiences, creating a locus of knowing "in which initially the meaning of all significances . . . is engendered in the domain of represented space" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 142). Motility also contributes to human perception of the body as a center of meaning:

> Insofar as I have a body through which I act in the world, space and time are not, for me, a collection of adjacent points nor are they a limitless number of relations synthesized by my consciousness, and into which it draws my body. I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them. The scope of this inclusion is the measure of that of my existence; but in any case it can never be all-embracing. The space and time which I inhabit are always in their different ways indeterminate horizons which contain other points of view. (p. 140)

Through the concept of motility, then, advisors actively can use their abilities of perception inculcated through a slate of individual experiences. But how are the interpretations as a result of perception, then, shared with a student?

Thought and Language

The body, as "our general medium for having a world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 146), constantly receives input from its environment. In order to assimilate and evaluate the stimuli it receives, the body

must be able to make meaning of the information received. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), this meaning-making is accomplished through a unique combination of thought, language, and speech, a triumvirate necessary for both internal and external communication. Language provides symbols through words that have meaning as generated through experience. Language in thought without speech and communication, however, is inevitably finite:

> A thought limited to existing for itself, independently of the constraints of speech and communication, would no sooner appear than it would sink into the unconscious, which means that it would not exist even for itself. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 177)

Every advising session, from the perfunctory distribution of course information to the immediate demands of crisis intervention, bristles with a concurrently-evolving process of conversation and internal dialogue. As I listen to a student's comments, my thoughts fly rapidly through a series of options, impressions, opinions, values, and misconceptions, all based on my accumulated experiences. In seconds, I will alternately and internally condemn, condone, empathize, dismiss, instruct, recommend, celebrate—often utilizing more than one response simultaneously, often in tandem with feelings of anger, sympathy, resignation, or resolve. However, when I respond I instantaneously choose from one of these internal responses, giving voice to my thoughts, selecting a particular approach as most appropriate, allowing the other thoughts to "sink into

unconsciousness." The simple question from a student—"What do you think?"—is an inquiry into my internal conversation, a request to bring to life a comment, suggestion, or thought that may be of value to the student, leaving my other thoughts to sink into an unspoken void.

Thinking, therefore, is incomplete without speech to give selected thoughts life, to place them before another person and to receive a response. Merleau-Ponty (1962) explains that speech "is indeed part of the experience of thinking, in the sense that we present our thought to ourselves through internal or external speech" (p. 177). External speech, therefore, "does not translate ready-made thought, but accomplishes it" (p. 178) due to the "actual existence of a linguistic community" (p. 178). In other words, a shared language facilitates communication about thought, for "the listener receives thought from speech itself" (p. 178).

The particular value of speech appears in the continuing accumulation of experience:

> The fact is that we have the power to understand over and above what we may have spontaneously thought. People can speak to us only a language which we already understand, each word of a difficult text awakens in us thoughts which were ours beforehand, but these meanings sometimes combine to form new thought which recasts them all, and we are transported to the heart of the matter, we find the source. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 178)

Thought and language, as articulated in speech, ultimately provide value as "a reflection in others, an ability to think according to others

which enriches our own thoughts" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 179). Is this reflective capacity the crux of the advisor/advisee relationship? If advising is a form of teaching, then is the best advising that which introduces other options for consideration, other personal vistas for viewing, other clays for different types of pots? Mark Twain observes that "It were not best that we should all think alike" (in Ayres, 1987, p. 229). Is this the true value of the interplay of thought, language, and speech—to show students that we should not all think alike?

In his last work, the unfinished *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty (1968) celebrates the interweaving of thought, language, and communication into conversation:

> A genuine conversation gives me access to thoughts that I did not know myself capable of, that I was not capable of, and sometimes I feel myself followed in a route unknown to myself which my words, cast back by the other, are in the process of tracing out for me. To suppose here that an intelligible world sustains the exchange would be to take a name for a solution—and furthermore it would be to grant us what we are maintaining: that it is by borrowing from the world structure that the universe of truth and of thought is constructed for us. (p. 13)

A true conversation, then, is a mutually beneficial experience. As an advisor, can I gain as much from the conversation with a student as I want to offer in my mode of advisor? What constitutes a true conversation within the experience of advising? For enlightenment on these questions, I enter into my own conversation with Gadamer.

Gadamer: The Power of Conversation

Language as a part of conversation is further explored by Gadamer (1960/1975), who asserts that "Language is at the same time a positive condition of, and guide to, experience itself" (p. 313). Like Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer believes that language is the medium by which the world actually exists:

> Language is not just one of man's [*sic*] possessions in the world, but on it depends the fact that man has a world at all. For man the world exists as world in a way that no other being in the world experiences. But this world is linguistic in nature. (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 401)

The linguistic attributes of the world, according to Gadamer (1960/1975) allow individual experiences "to embrace the most varied relationships in life" (p. 406) because language connects these experiences. Expanding upon Merleau-Ponty's thoughts regarding conversation, Gadamer (1960/1975) sees the value of linguistics as a facilitator of exchange:

> A conversation is the process of two people understanding each other. Thus it is characteristic of every true conversation that each opens himself [*sic*] to the other person, truly accepts his point of view as worthy of consideration and gets inside the other to such an extent that he understands not a particular individual, but what he says. The thing that has to be grasped is the objective rightness or otherwise of his opinion, so that they can agree with each other on the subject. Thus one does not relate the other's opinion to him but to one's own views. (p. 347)

Keeping Company

Yet, what does it mean to have a conversation? Is the dialogue between advisor and student a conversation? According to its Latin

antecedents, to have a "conversation" is "to keep company," "to live with," "to turn about with" (from the Latin *conversari* [Barnhart, 1988, p. 216]). Does an advisor "keep company" with an advisee? In a conversation with a student, do I try to turn the student about, giving directions and counsel that would indicate a preference of one choice over the other? Do I truly accept the "objective rightness" of the student's opinion, as Gadamer suggests?

Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, maintains that we engage in interactions with others in an autobiographical way, utilizing our accumulated experiences, as Merleau-Ponty has observed, to establish our way of being in the world. As a result, Covey (1989) identifies five autobiographical responses used in listening and conversing:

> We evaluate—we either agree or disagree; we probe—we ask questions from our own frame of reference; we advise—we give counsel based on our own experience; we interpret—we try to figure people out, to explain their motives, their behavior, based on our own motives and behavior. (p. 245)

The fifth, and preferential, type of engagement is empathic, which "involves much more than registering, reflecting, or even understanding the words that are said" (Covey, 1989, p. 240). Yet, how often in my advising sessions do I limit my conversation to one of evaluation, probing, advising, or interpreting? Can an advisor engage in a conversation based on equal participation when the relationship

has an implicit authority relationship? Is the format of the relationship a particular issue in dealing with first-year students?

In retrospect, I think that I often fall within Covey's categories of advising and interpreting. I assume that the student wants from me certain advice or explanation, and I am glad to assume the role of authority and comply with the student's wishes. I wonder if an advisor ever has had a true and equal conversation with a student. Would this be threatening to the advisor? Would it blur the advisor/advisee relationship? Would such a conversation even be appropriate? However, if a conversation is not truly open, can deep understanding ever occur?

The Path to Understanding

Gadamer (1960/1975) displays his advocacy of the use of open dialogue as a pathway to clarity of thought, emphasizing that language is "the middle ground in which understanding and agreement concerning the object takes place between two people" (p. 345), "the universal medium in which understanding itself is realized" (p. 350). However, what constitutes understanding? How are language and understanding interrelated? In exploring the concept of the "hermeneutic problem" (Gadamer,1960/ 1975, p. 274), Gadamer postulates that understanding requires placing ourselves into the situations of other individuals to become aware of their otherness, of

the "indissoluble individuality of the other person" (p. 272). This placing of ourselves creates a "horizon:"

> The concept of the "horizon" suggests itself because it expresses the wide, superior vision that the person who is seeking to understand must have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it, but to see it better within a larger whole and in truer proportion. (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 272)

The insights achieved through this "horizon" thus allow the individual to comprehend the difference between interpretation and understanding:

> Interpretation is not an occasional additional act subsequent to understanding, but rather understanding is always an interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding. (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 274)

Therefore, interpretation is accomplished through the medium of language, given to us through a foundation of common symbols. All understanding is interpretation; as a result, "All interpretation takes place in the medium of a language which would allow the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter's own language" (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 350). It is this sense of understanding through conversation that will guide my interaction with the participants in this study.

Questioning as the Opening

As I re-read Gadamer's stance on conversation, language, and interpretation, an unsettled issue came to mind: How does this process begin within the arena of advising? Research on academic

advising (e.g., Frost, 1991; Hart, 1995; Strommer, 1995; Upcraft, 1995) clearly establishes that first-year students do not usually seek out advising, often because they simply do not know that it may be helpful. However, once a student is in my office, how do I usually begin the dialogue? I initiate our discussion through questioning, "the art of conducting a real conversation" (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 330).

Questioning establishes a direction, a focus, a starting point. "To ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled" (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 326). As an advisor, I have asked questions about virtually every aspect of life as a first-year student, depending on the individual involved. I have inquired about grades, relationships with teachers, and study habits. I have asked for details on course selections, majors, and summer jobs. I have queried students about their involvement in co-curricular activities such as student organizations, and I have probed for answers about a student's use of alcohol and drugs.

If I am listening intently, if I have set aside my own predispositions, my questions can lead to deeper questions. Gadamer (1960/1975) says that this logical progression in a conversation leads to new levels of understanding:

> Thus a person who seeks to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He [*sic*] must understand it as an

> answer to a question. If we go back behind what is said, then we inevitably ask questions beyond what is said. We understand . . . only by acquiring the horizon of the question that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers. Thus the meaning of a sentence is relative to the question to which it is a reply; i.e., it necessarily goes beyond what is said in it. (p. 333)

Does questioning lead to mutual understanding? A student's hesitancy to answer or an attempt to avoid a direct response may provide more resonance with me as the advisor, for such actions often enable me to broaden my interpretation of the situation at hand. Is the subject too painful? Is the student unable to cope with the severity of the problem? Is the issue in such a state of flux that no answer is possible? As an advisor, I have the responsibility to help students understand that questions can ultimately lead to answers—perhaps not today, or next week, or next year—if only, as Rilke (1934/1984) proposes, the individual is willing to wait:

> Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the *questions themselves* as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer. (p. 34)

Questioning, then, is integral to an advisor's connectedness with a student, for questions often lead to deeper inquiries and fuller understanding. So, too, will questioning be invaluable as I explore the richness, the profundity of the lived experience of six advisors as we

engage in conversations regarding their engagement with first-year college students.

The word "question" traces its history to the Latin *quaestionem*, "a seeking" (Skeat, 1963, p. 492). In effect, through the dialogue with and the questioning of my participants, I am seeking the essence of the phenomenon of advising first-year college students, revealing its essence through the unique confluence of thinking, questioning, interpretation, and conversation:

> Thus the hermeneutical phenomenon proves to be a special case of the general relationship between thinking and speaking, the mysterious intimacy of which is bound up with the way in which speech is contained, in a hidden way, in thinking. Interpretation, like conversation, is a closed circle within the dialectic of question and answer. It is a genuine historical life-situation that takes place in the medium of language that . . . we can call a conversation. (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 351)

<u>The Universality of Language</u>

As Gadamer (1960/1975) concludes his investigation of the symbiosis between language and experience, he states that in his analysis he has "stumbled upon the universal function of language" (p. 365). "Understanding and interpretation are related to the linguistic tradition in a specific way," observes Gadamer, "but at the same time they transcend this relationship . . . because everything that is intelligible must be accessible to understanding and to interpretation" (p. 365). As a result, the symbiosis of thought, language, and understanding is a phenomenon shared by all people who engage in any sort of human communication, all woven together

in a single unbroken tapestry. I turn, now, to the way in which I will engage my participants in such a conversation.

Towards a Phenomenological Understanding

Advising is a lived human experience that incorporates place, body, and language in the conversation between student and advisor. In order to explore the lived experience of advising first-year college students, I have engaged in conversations with six college advisors, heeding the philosophies of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer to bring forth the essence of the advisors' experiences. Entering their world, I have plumbed for the essentiality of the phenomenon, exploring my interest in that which is essentially not replaceable (van Manen, 1990). Throughout my conversations and my writing, I have attempted to remain mindful of van Manen's (1990) admonition:

> To *do* hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal. (p. 18)

Searching for the Light Within

As I embark on an explanation of the process of phenomenological inquiry used in this study, I return to my metaphor of the potter for a fuller understanding of the importance of the human experience:

> *Craft,* as you may know, comes from the German word *Kraft*, meaning power or strength. As Emerson said, the law is: 'Do the thing, and you shall have the power. But they who do not the thing, have not the powers.' We can't fake craft. It lies in

> the act. The strains we have put in the clay break open in the fire. We do not have the craft, or craftsmanship, if we do not speak to the light that lives within the earthly materials; this means ALL earthly materials, including men [*sic*] themselves. (Richards, 1962, p. 12)

In my conversations with advisors, I sought "the light that lives within" these individuals who advise first-year college students. Phenomenological inquiry was selected as my "craft" because "the choice should reflect more than mere whim, preference, taste, or fashion. Rather, the method one chooses ought to maintain a certain harmony with the deep interest that makes one an educator (a parent or teacher) in the first place" (van Manen, 1990, p. 2). As an educator, I sought to explore the facets of academic advising that allowed me to fulfill van Manen's (1990) expectations for educational research:

> From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to *know* the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching—questioning—theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to *become* the world. (p. 5)

For me, the act of "attaching myself to the world" was realized in the opportunities for insight found in identifying themes within conversations. With every word written, I endeavored to create a compelling narrative that fully illuminated the phenomenon. I also discovered a deeper self-understanding, uncovered as I mined my own experiences in order to understand the essence of advising first-year

students more fully. In effect, my efforts at "becoming the world" became an adventure—an intriguing premise, as described by Gadamer (1960/1975):

> An adventure . . . interrupts the customary course of events, but is positively and significantly related to the context which it interrupts. Thus an adventure lets life become felt as a whole, in its breadth and in its strength. Here lies the fascination of an adventure. It removes the conditions and obligations of everyday life. It ventures out into the uncertain.
>
> But at the same time it knows that, as an adventure, it has an exceptional character and thus remains related to the return of the everyday, into which the adventure cannot be taken. Thus the adventure is 'passed through', like a test, from which one emerges enriched and more mature. (p. 62)

Heading Toward the Fire: My Methodology for Engagement

According to van Manen (1990), "Hermeneutic phenomenological research may be seen as a dynamic interplay among six research activities" (p. 30). Using van Manen's (1990) framework as a guide, I embarked on a study of the lived experience of advising first-year college students.

Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world. In my selection of academic advising as the phenomenon to be studied, I identified a task that has been a cornerstone of my career for over twenty years. Van Manen (1990) explains that "To orient oneself to a phenomenon always implies a particular interest, station or vantage point in life. . . . So when one orients to a phenomenon one is approaching this experience with a certain interest" (p. 40).

My long-term commitment to advising led me to apply the principles of human science research to the investigation of the experience of advising first-year college students. My unexpected encounter with Keith, as recounted in Chapter One, provided the impetus for this exploration. Further investigation into the infinite shadings of advising as a unique human experience have been brought forward in Chapter Two, providing a departure point for opening the phenomenon of my research. The philosophical writings on body and language—as well as on the premise of phenomenological inquiry itself—additionally "set the stage," not only for my entering into conversations with other advisors, but also for continued sensitivity to my own experiences as an advisor.

Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it. The importance of personal episodes as an integral part of phenomenological inquiry was never far from my mind, because "My own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else's are" (van Manen, 1990, p. 54). As I engaged in my research, I continued my role as an advisor to first-year college students, living in the experience as I explored it with others for a fuller, deeper understanding—allowing me to consider actively my own engagement in the phenomenon. During this process, I held as a priority the adherence to words written by Merleau-Ponty (1962): "The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to

the world, I have no doubt that I have communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible" (p. xvi).

To illustrate further the experiences of my phenomenon, I engaged in conversations with six individuals who serve exclusively as advisors to first-year students. These dialogues with my contemporaries in advising were vital to my inquiry because

> The point of phenomenological research is to 'borrow' other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience. (van Manen, 1990, p. 62)

Through these conversations and reflections, I expanded my understanding of the lived experience of advising first-year college students as I gathered the reflections of these advisors.

Solicitation of participants. Because the criteria for my research specified that participants work exclusively with first-year students, I solicited volunteers employed at a regional comprehensive university of 5,000 students, an institution that requires each first-year student to enroll in an "Introduction to Higher Education" orientation seminar. The instructor of the seminar also serves as the students' first academic advisor. Through a general "call for volunteers" circulated at a training workshop for orientation seminar instructors at this university, six individuals self-identified as interested participants (see Appendix A for a sample of the solicitation announcement). The four female respondents included a Black

woman with 26 years' experience; a white woman with three years' experience; and two white women, each with only one year of advising experience at the time of our conversations. The male participants, both white, offered two extremes in experience, with one having advised first-year students since 1972 (31 years), and the other having just finished his inaugural advising year.

The research process: establishing the conversations. Van Manen (1990) asserts that conversations may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon. Conversations with each advisor opened the way to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of advising first-year college students, because "there is within it an infinity of meaning to be elaborated and interpreted" (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 416).

Two conversations were held with each participant, one per month in successive months. Each session lasted approximately 60 minutes and occurred in a location acceptable to each participant. Each participant's professional responsibilities determined scheduling. During the first conversation, the focus and scope of the study was re-affirmed, and the University of Maryland Human Subjects Consent Form (see Appendix B) was reviewed and signed by each participant.

Gadamer (1960/1975) reminds us that "We cannot have experiences without asking questions" (p. 325). Therefore, in order to assure that each conversation maintained an orientation toward my research focus, I began each initial conversation with a question that attempted to gain access to anecdotes regarding each advisor's experience with advising. My entering question offered an opening by which they could explore their personal engagement with advising: "Tell me about a time in your advising of first year students that was most memorable for you. What was the situation? What was your experience of it?"

Building a conversation through questioning is a fundamental facet of phenomenological inquiry, for the response to a question "is the reason that all understanding is always more than the mere recreation of someone else's meaning. Asking [the question] opens up possibilities of meaning and thus what is meaningful passes into one's own thinking on the subject" (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 338). Therefore, the conversation built upon itself as I offered questions in response to the participants' comments or anecdotes in order to explore more fully the meaning of the experience.

After the first conversations, I compiled a transcript and engaged in a preliminary formulation of themes. Thematizing after the initial conversation offered an initial glimpse into the phenomenological characteristics of the participants' experiences and

allowed me, as the researcher, to take the first steps toward giving "shape to the shapeless" (van Manen, 1990, p. 89).

The second conversation with each participant built up the themes identified in our first encounter, as I shared the results of my preliminary thematizing to establish "objects of reflection . . . in which both the researcher and the interviewee collaborate" (van Manen, 1990, p. 99). In this stage, my participants and I attempted "to interpret the significance of the preliminary themes in the light of the original phenomenological question" (p. 99).

After the second conversation, each participant was encouraged to explore further, through the creation of a written reflection, the themes identified in the two conversations. "Writing forces the person into a reflective attitude—in contrast to face-to-face conversation in which people are much more immediately involved" (van Manen, 1990, p. 64). The fundamental focus of creating a lived-experience description (van Manen, 1990, p. 64) is to write about an experience as it was lived, without explanations or background details. Van Manen (1990) advises that in their writing, the participants should approach the experience "from the inside, as it were; almost like a state of mind: the feelings, the mood, the emotions, etc." (p. 65).
In addition to the two individual conversations and the completion of individual written reflections, a group conversation was held to explore the themes collectively, with other persons offering up

possibilities that an individual might not have thought about alone. Elaborations on this conversation may be found on pages 156-158.

As I continued to open the phenomenon of advising through writing, I explored themes through the use of literature that illuminated the experience, in the same manner that poetry, literature, and drama have been cited in Chapters One and Two. I also returned to the writings of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer to direct me to a deeper understanding of the text gathered through phenomenological inquiry.

Finally, I continued to mine the phenomenon metaphorically. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) observe that "Metaphor is one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices, and spiritual awareness" (p. 193). Through the continued exploration of my phenomenon through metaphor, I attempted to bring to the surface aspects of advising currently hidden beneath the "everydayness" of the event.

Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon. Gadamer (1976) reminds us that "Only by returning to the original sources of intuition and the insights into essences derived from them . . . can concepts be clarified intuitively, problems be posed anew on an intuitive basis and then solved in principle" (p. 132). Therefore, phenomenological themes "may be understood as the

structures of experience. So when we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 79).

In order to identify the essential themes that best reflect the essence of my phenomenon, I again turned to van Manen (1990), using his writings as a guidepost in my mining of meanings. Understanding that "a phenomenological theme is much less a singular statement . . . than a fuller description of the structure of a lived experience" (p. 92) I wrote towards the uncovering of thematic aspects in the texts of individual conversations and my participants' written reflections, using van Manen's (1990) three approaches:

1. By reading wholistically, I first identified a phrase that captured "the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole" (p. 93);
2. Then, through selective reading, I reviewed the text to ascertain "what statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described" (p. 93);
3. As a final step, a detailed reading—via single sentence or sentence cluster—answered the question, "What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?" (p. 93).

Once I completed my thematizing based on the first two conversations and the written reflections, I invited each participant to engage in a final group conversation. The themes I had discovered in our previous conversations served as our touchstones as we discussed "the significance of the . . . themes in light of the original phenomenological question" (van Manen, 1990, p. 99). After dinner at my home, I opened the conversation with selected readings from my writing drafts and with a discussion of the metaphor of pottery. Questions in this conversation were offered as elaborations of themes found in individual transcripts:

- What is it like to be thanked for providing a helpful answer to a student's question?
- How does it feel when you think you are unable to relate to a student's situation?
- What is the feeling of participating in a student's discovery of self-responsibility?
- Have you ever experienced any feelings of inadequacy as an advisor?
- What are the feelings you experience when you do not know all the institution policies that you feel you should know?

These themes opened to me Merleau-Ponty's (1962) ideal that to understand a phenomenon is "to be a consciousness or rather to be an experience . . . to hold inner communication with the world, the

body and other people, to be with them instead of being beside them" (p. 96).

Such a collaborative self-reflective orientation (van Manen, 1990, p. 99) between participants and myself led to a conversation that "gradually diminishe[d] into a series of more and more pauses, and finally to silence" (p. 99). The participants were silenced by "the stillness of reflection" (p. 99) in their realization of the profundity of what we had achieved:

> It is indeed therefore true that the "private worlds" communicate, that each of them is given to its incumbent as a variant of one common world. The communication makes us the witnesses of one sole world, as the synergy of our eyes suspends them on one unique thing. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 11)

Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. Through the process of writing and revision, I sought to engage the reader in the essence of advising, making my experiences the reader's experiences, sharing the intricacies of the phenomenon in such a way that "the thoughts of the reader are stimulated and held in productive movement" (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 355). So that I could fully explore the advisors' experiences, I established pseudonyms for all respondents and for the students present with the advisors.

According to van Manen (1990), "Human science meaning can only be communicated textually—by way of organized narrative or prose" (p. 78). In developing my narrative, I relied on such forms as

the anecdote, “a device for making comprehensible the phenomenon of conversational relation which every human being maintains with his or her world” (van Manen, 1990, p. 116). These anecdotes, culled from the conversations held with my participants, offered insight into their particular lived experiences. Writing was my primary method of exploration into the essentiality of my phenomenon, serving as the tangible representation of the intangibility of the experience. Writing and re-writing had as its goal the true showing of the essence of the phenomenon, although I understood that the narrative of a lived experience can never be the experience itself, for once the experience has ended, any further consideration becomes remembrance.

“The essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). Through my writing, I have tried to create a text that draws the reader into the essence of the lived experience of advising first-year college students. Writing, then, is the fundamental tool of a truly engaged phenomenological narrative: “Writing has the methodological advantage that it presents the hermeneutical problem in all its purity, detached from everything psychological. . . In writing, this meaning of what is spoken exists purely for itself, completely detached from all emotional elements of expression and communication” (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 354).

Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon. "Advising, rather than an extension of the educator's role, is integral to it" (Berdahl, 1995, p. 7). As I explored the lived experience of advising, I realized that the relationship between pedagogy and research could be stated in much the same way: Pedagogy, rather than an extension of the researcher's role, is integral to it.

The premise of pedagogically-oriented research is advocated by van Manen (1990) as the primary reason for research in education. "A researcher who sees himself or herself as educator and who wants to arrive at better pedagogic understandings . . . needs to inquire (reflect, speak, and write) in a manner that is both oriented and strong in a pedagogic sense" (p. 138). In other words, researchers enter a "half-life" (van Manen, 1990, p. 138) when they abdicate their responsibility for maintaining an active engagement between research and its pedagogical applications.

According to van Manen (1990), "To do research, to theorize, is to be involved in the consideration of text, the meaning of dialogical textuality and its promise for pedagogy" (p. 151). As a result, true phenomenological writing, in order to maintain its pedagogical connections, must meet four conditions (van Manen, 1990):

1. The text should be oriented in such a way as to maintain a constant connection to the pedagogical implications of the research.
2. The text should offer the strongest possible pedagogic interpretation of the phenomenon.
3. The text should be rich in its content, using narrative, existentials, and phenomenological description to engage the reader and to emphasize the pedagogical aspects of the experience.
4. The text should have a depth necessary to allow a full orientation to its meaning: "Depth is the means the things have to remain distinct, to remain things while not being what I look at at present. . . It is because of depth that the things have a flesh" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 219).

As I engaged in my research into the lived experience of advising first-year students, I strove to maintain a pedagogical orientation to my subject, "reaching for something beyond, restoring a forgotten or broken wholeness by recollecting something lost, past, or eroded, and be reconciling it in our experience of the present with a vision of what should be" (van Manen, 1990, p. 153). In bringing closure to my exploration, I have offered pedagogical recommendations for the practice of advising from the insights gained from the study.

Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. In my writing, I investigated the phenomenon of the lived experience of advising first-year students through a narrative based on advisor reflections. As I included my own experiences, I searched for the cues, the hints, the signals of common experiences that, through my narrative, could illustrate the experience of advising in such a way that the reader could share in the making of meaning. Themes in my writing surfaced as a result of my conversations, my exploration into literary descriptions, and my engagement with the metaphor of pottery.

Ideally, through my writing the reader will discover a deeper understanding of the experience of advising. Insight may come gradually, over the course of reflective thought, or may appear instantaneously, in the course of everyday life, as the individual teeters on the brink of true understanding, perhaps revealed in a task as simple as berry-picking:

> Highbush blueberry and black chokeberry, some arrowwood, all firmly sprouted and solid on soft mounds of sphagnum. They are leafless, a few blue-black remnants of the once lush berry crop dangling from twigs. I crush some in my hands. They stain my fingertips, squirt like black ink in my palm. Every poem, Frost said, begins with a lump in the throat. Not today, I think. It isn't a lump that's got me musing here, my fingers plucking these shrunken things, piling them up in my palm. It's the sense that I'm about to see something, one of those moments you can't force: you stand there, trying not to think, repeating the gesture, picking the shriveled berries, letting the body practice over and over, fingers to bush, the small tug, the squished berry, fingers back to the growing pile in the palm, waiting, waiting without agenda, for the moment of insight, for

> the flash that shifts the perspective, for the new vision to slice through and reshuffle the pieces. You know you're close to something, you can tell by the way the rest of the world recedes until there's only your mind, which you try to focus and empty simultaneously, remembering the best way to do this impossible task is through ritual—fingers to bush, the small tug, the squished berry… (Hurd, 2001, p. 117)

Hurd writes of the everydayness of an activity as seemingly mundane as berry-picking, yet she senses that within the gestures of hand to berry to basket there skates beneath the surface some hidden meaning.

As Hurd intuits that some "new vision" is about to appear, I wonder if I, too, am "about to see something" within my phenomenon. My engagement with the clay has revealed aspects of pottery, and of advising, that I had not previously considered. My dialogues with Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer have opened me to new levels of understanding. I now enter into conversations with six advisors to aid me further in my search for the essence of the experience of advising first-year students.

CHAPTER FOUR:

CURA WITHIN

The Gift of *Cura*

> Once when 'Care' was crossing a river, she saw some clay; she thoughtfully took up a piece and began to shape it. While she was meditating on what she had made, Jupiter came by. 'Care' asked him to give it spirit, and this he gladly granted. But when she wanted her name to be bestowed upon it, he forbade this and demanded that it be given his name instead. While 'Care' and Jupiter were disputing, Earth arose and desired that her name be conferred on the creature, since she had furnished it with part of her body. They asked Saturn to be their arbiter, and he made the following decision, which seemed a just one: 'Since you, Jupiter, have given its spirit, you shall receive that spirit at its death; and since you, Earth, have given its body, you shall receive its body. But since 'Care' first shaped this creature, she shall possess it as long as it lives. And because there is now a dispute among you as to its name, let it be called '*homo*', for it is made out of *humus* (earth). (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 242)

In this tale attributed to Hyginus, *Cura* ("Care"), the first potter, formed and shaped a lump of clay with gentleness of touch, imbuing it with her own compassion. Now, the spirit of *Cura* reaches across the centuries, urging kindred potters to shape and form their own portions of earth, their own humus. As the legacy of *Cura* is portrayed in the loving attention given by the potter to each vessel and piece created, the essence of the experience of advising first-year college students ultimately rests within care.

Advisors exhibit care as illustrated in the origins of the word—the Old Gothic *karon*"to be concerned about" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 144). Noddings (1992) asserts that "A caring relation is, in its most

basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings—a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for" (p. 15). What, then, is the uncommon aspect of the encounter between advisor and first-year college student that reveals the essence of the phenomenon, that makes the experience of advising a unique human encounter in care?

Six advisors guide me in the making of meanings regarding the place of care in the advising relationship, their stories illuminating the significance found in the everydayness of advising. Their words impress subtle indentations on the clay that revolves on my wheel, the clay spinning to its final form, moving toward its ultimate emergence as the vessels that carry the essence of the experience of advising first-year college students.

***Cura's* Descendents**

Consummate professional. Tour guide. School mom. No-nonsense aunt. Coach. Benevolent uncle. Each advisor brings to the advising relationship a unique persona developed from a series of life experiences, offering perspectives that illuminate, in a deeper and more meaningful fashion, the experience of advising first-year college students, living the legacy of *Cura* in their focus on providing care for their students. What insights can be uncovered through conversations with these advisors? What themes reveal themselves through their words and thoughts? As I explore the stories of my respondents, I write my way toward an uncovering of the essence of

the phenomenon of first-year advising. Van Manen (1990) reminds us that writing clarifies our view, allowing us to see that which has yet been unseen, "because it is in and through the words that the shining through (the invisible) becomes visible" (p. 130). My writing leads me toward the center of the phenomenon, towards an uncovering of that which makes the phenomenon what it is.

Berman (1994c) observes that "Clearly one's insights and experiences influence how one is with another person in a caring relationship" (p. 163). The advisors who share their stories—*Cura's* descendents—bring to their roles as advisors distinctly different life experiences that become part of the person who they present through advising. In conversations with me, these six advisors, working with students at a small mid-Atlantic university, reveal the joys, the challenges, and the selves that they encounter in the experience of advising first-year college students.

The Potter as Professional

Hannah, a soft-spoken humanities professor with a slight Southern drawl, asked to be assigned a cohort of freshmen because she had learned in her advising of upper-class students that many of them, as first-year students, had made incorrect decisions regarding course selection and academic planning. As a result, by the time students reached their junior- and senior-level courses, according to Hannah, "They are so dug into their majors that even if it's not a good

path for them, it's very hard for me to pull them out of it because they've invested so much." In order "to save them a lot of heartache later," Hannah added fifteen freshmen to her advising load and was completing her first full year of advising freshmen when we held our conversations.

Hannah delineates specific parameters in her role as an advisor. She identifies herself as a professional in her field whose primary purpose is to provide a positive role model for the first-year students with whom she works. In fact, Hannah is adamant that "I hold myself to high professional standards, and that, to me, if I'm not inspiring, I'm not doing my job. So that's what I expect of myself." Committed to her stance that "I better be inspiring some of my students or I'm not worth my salt," Hannah provides students ample opportunities to witness a faculty member dedicated fully to her profession. Earning tenure after only four years, Hannah serves on multiple campus faculty committees, participates in a leadership position in her national organization, and publishes regularly in scholarly journals. In addition, she is continuing her education beyond her doctoral program, expanding on the research completed for her dissertation to pursue a second master's degree in linguistics.

The Potter as Tour Guide

Andrew, a professional therapist with a quick wit and an interest in science fiction, has chosen the college campus, rather than

a religious institution, as the environment in which he can best engage in a helping relationship. He has advised, by his own count, in excess of 400 first-year students since 1972. Building upon his master's degree in counseling, Andrew's experience in advising has developed gradually, showing a distinct level of personal comfort with procedural issues and programmatic requirements; he observes that "I may know most, if not all, of the rules and the regulations and the intricacies of how to navigate successfully through four years of college."

Throughout his advising career, Andrew has established as a primary mode of engagement a focus on students' particular needs, observing, "These individuals who come to us for advising, they pretty well at some level know what it is that they would like to do, but at some level they are probably terrified that they may not be able to do it, or may not be able to do it well." Andrew emphasizes the importance of service to each student, of setting aside his own values, of "supporting students and helping students understand, get in contact with themselves, grow in their own knowledge of themselves."

Bowing to his years of accumulated experience, Andrew likens himself to an experienced tour guide: "I have visited where you are and I have experienced what it is that you are doing and what you are going through." With his fervent passion for allowing each student to play the primary role in the advising relationship, Andrew

emphasizes, "The direction is with the person that I'm serving, not with me."

The Potter as "School Mom"

Ellen, a professor of biology, provides a very colorful description of her relationship to the first-year students whom she advises: "I'm the mother hen! It's my brood; it's my eggs, and I sit on them. I roll them around! I'm grandmother and mother, all rolled into one!" As the "school mom," Ellen folds advising into a surrogate family environment.

For Ellen, the "school mom" persona is comprised of equal parts cheerleading, hugging, playfulness, and high expectations. She speaks animatedly about the relationship with many of her first-year students, a relationship that allows them to "hang out" in her office as they would in a friend's dormitory room. She allows students to call her by a nickname, and she freely dispenses hugs to both congratulate and console ("Hugs are the absolute best," she confides). However, Ellen understands that her cadre of students, each of whom has expressed the desire to prepare for a career in one of several medical professions, face a particularly stringent roster of academic requirements. To help students through the first year, Ellen consciously balances her approach to the students, noting that "I try to keep things not so serious, yet at the same time keep expectations at a certain level and never let them down."

Ellen initially volunteered to advise first-year students "because I wanted to get them started right. I ended up seeing so many sophomores who wanted to be doctors, who had the ability, and who had been advised totally wrong." On a broader level, Ellen admits that first-year advising can help her "build the pre-med reputation of the school, too."

Ellen came to advising through a somewhat circuitous route. She pursued her bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in the sciences after having been a stay-at-home mother and an interior decorator. Now in her third year of advising, Ellen realizes that she brings to the process a desire to "right some wrongs" from her own experiences as a student:

> I have to actually guard against preaching about everything: preaching about studying, preaching about—you know, because I learned about studying the hard way. I didn't know to study when I was an undergraduate . . . and I want them to skip that part that I wasn't happy about in my own experiences.

The Potter as "No-Nonsense Aunt"

Another "long-term" advisor, Miranda, whose advising experiences parallel her 26 years as a student affairs administrator, identifies herself as an advisor with a "no nonsense" attitude and a penchant for "fussing" at her students. She is also known for her dogged determination to be sure that students understand the importance of self-reliance.

Miranda describes, clearly and without hesitation, her advising approach: "Well, I want to help people, but I don't like being used." For Miranda, a definite line of demarcation exists between helping a student and being cast as that student's scapegoat, because "All of these kids, if you let them, they will drain you in terms of what their needs are." She identifies herself as "solid:" "Solid because when a student comes in to talk to me about anything, they don't leave me wondering what the answer is. It's very clear in how and what I communicate." The message Miranda conveys focuses on self-reliance, on students taking responsibility for their own life, on students understanding the consequences of their actions. "I really feel my job is not a popularity contest," Miranda explains. "My job is to tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear."

What students need to hear, according to Miranda, is a lesson in reality: if a person identifies a particular goal in life, then there must be a concomitant desire to make the necessary commitment to achieve that goal. She has no tolerance for students whose stereotypes prohibit opportunities for growth:

> Take the chip off your shoulder, the chip being "I already know it all; nobody can tell me anything;" the chip being embarrassment that their peers are going to know they don't know something, the chip being everybody Black is going to rob me, the chip being everybody white is out to get me.

Miranda's straightforward approach to advising first-year students may stem, in part, from her own experiences. As the first

member of her family to attend college, the aspects of life unique to a post-secondary environment completely overwhelmed her during her first year of college. She recounts calling home and crying, "They've got me in all these 'ology' classes! What's an 'ology'?" She has vivid memories of studying high school material, in tandem with her college assignments, to improve basic skills in reading and math because "I was just behind in everything." A constant theme through her graduate studies in counseling and her professional career is the "self-promise" to never forget her own experiences as a first-year student; as a result, "I tend to pick up on students who are lost and afraid to ask certain questions because they think they're going to look stupid."

These memories play out in an establishment of strict relationships with each student. "I draw a line with every student as to how far I'm going to go," Miranda explains, "because I'm not about to be their problem solver on every issue. You can't make it somebody else's fault, and you're not going to make it my problem." Although she has allowed some students to call her Aunt Miranda, she usually maintains her "iron fist in a velvet glove" persona. She admits that this approach to advising may not be for all students, noting that some students simply "disappear" from her advising roster. Miranda is philosophical about students' perceptions of her as an advisor,

observing that "I don't try to be all things to all people; that's not even a goal."

The Potter as Coach

Rachel, a coach and advisor with one year's experience, brings to her students a background in sports, a newly-minted doctorate in biomechanics, and an enthusiasm for each student's potential. As the youngest of the advisors with whom I engaged in conversations, Rachel compensates for her lack of experience with her efforts to present herself as someone who is interested in each student and who is worthy of each student's trust.

Rachel freely admits that she is still very much a novice as an academic advisor. Individual academic advising was only an informal responsibility in her previous position as a coach and sports consultant on biomechanics. At 28, Rachel is closer in age to the students than any of my other conversants; however, she has found that her youthful appearance and choice of extra-curricular activities often provide a form of entrance into a conversation that "traditionally-aged" advisors would not have. She recounts with a smile the several occasions in which she has met a student for the first time while sporting scrapes and bruises from a recent endurance ride (a long-distance cycling event). On more than one occasion, the student is not sure that Rachel is, in fact, the advisor.

Rachel finds that she is repeatedly surprised at the universality of certain experiences shared with her students. She remembers her less-than-stellar attitude in college, noting, "I was a 'crummy' undergraduate. I went to college to run; school was third or fourth on the list." Now, entering the college environment as an adult, "I'm really amazed that even though there are so many things that are different about these kids, it's not that different." She observes, too, that "The emotional struggles, the personal self-confidence and all that seem to be so the same as what I had."

For Rachel, as a novice advisor, her greatest desire resides in her wish that the students see her as trustworthy: "They have to see you as someone who matters, for them to bother to listen to you. . . If you can somehow connect with them and show them that you're invested and that you're going to be consistent and trustworthy and everything . . . they'll listen to you."

The Potter as Benevolent Uncle

"Why do I do what I do?" Walter repeats my question, settles back into the chair, and allows silence to fill the room as he considers his answer. "When I think of why I do what I do, why I put in the long, crazy, stupid hours that I do for less money than I can make other places, it's because I make a difference, or I believe I make a difference in people's lives." For Walter, an affable student activities

director, impacting students in a positive manner is the center of his professional universe.

Walter readily admits that he navigated his undergraduate years on his own; the assistance of an advisor was "something I didn't have a whole lot of when I went through college." As a result, he traces his academic focus in graduate school and his professional choices, in part, back to his own unmet personal needs as a first-year student. He felt strongly enough about the deficiencies in his own undergraduate experience that he specifically requested a first-year advising assignment in order to work more closely with students on academic issues. At the time of our conversations, he had just completed his first year of working with freshmen as an academic advisor.

Walter clearly articulates that "The crux of my advising philosophy is that I don't like to do things for students because it doesn't teach them anything." Walter's approach to advising centers on helping students to help themselves. He is attuned to the larger social duty of the university to facilitate students' efforts in achieving a strong sense of self-responsibility, stating that "I don't think we're doing anyone any service here" if students are not provided opportunities to develop ownership of their lives and their futures.

Walter, at 35, is experiencing similar feelings to those voiced by Rachel regarding age. At one time, he thoroughly enjoyed staying

abreast of student trends and interests; now, he "has to work a little more at it." In discussing attempts to be current in student tastes, Walter observes, "I realized that when you're young you automatically know what it is, and now I don't automatically know what things are anymore. I have to work at it to try to understand it, just to keep that connection." Now, he views himself as shifting from being a contemporary of college students to assuming the role of "the good-hearted uncle who's always there whenever they want."

Being Called to Care

Through our conversations, all of the advisors reveal that they have experienced, in some form or another, the call to care. Yet what does it mean to be called to care? Why have these six individuals been drawn to present themselves in a caring relationship in the advising of first-year college students?

For some, advising is a natural outcome of an inner beckoning. Walter, in considering his career options, knew that "My heart is with people and education, so that's where I went. Numbers aren't my game." When he works with first-year college students, he focuses his care on assisting students to develop the skills they will need beyond college, "helping them develop the ownership, the responsibility they need to carry them on beyond here." Andrew also was drawn to the college campus for vocational reasons, in response to an inner urge that called him to focus on helping relationships:

> Years ago, I was coming out of the army and trying to decide on going into the seminary or going into college or just what I was going to do with my life. I did a lot of soul searching, and I realized that the thing in this life that most often gives me that feeling, that warm feeling . . . occurred for me most often when I was providing service to others, when I was helping others in some way to accomplish for themselves, and the desire to fulfill that . . . is what has driven my career choices and my work ever since.

Both Hannah and Rachel find their expression of care exhibited through a concern for each student's individuality. Hannah observes that "I don't think there's any one way to advise students. . . I try to remember that it doesn't matter what the student looks like, or where they're from, but if they really want my help, then I need to just encourage them." She also knows how her expressions of care are manifested: "If I see a student who doesn't have a thick enough skin, *and* is academically unsuccessful, *and* who has an interest elsewhere, then I'm going to be the first one to help that student find a better place." Rachel, on the other hand, shows her care as a form of celebration through curiosity:

> I'm really curious about who they are, and how they're doing and how they're going to do it, and I'm dying to know where they're going to be in five years or in ten years. You know, I won't know for 99% of them. But I'm really curious about the nature of the relationships.

As for Miranda and Ellen, clear purpose and a straightforward approach are the avenues by which they express care. Miranda states that care is a "feeling of clarity . . . I want them to stay here, it's what I can do to keep them here." "I always try to work with the person," she

states, because "One thing I think as an advisor that's important is that you just can't worry about the grades; you've got to worry about the person." Ellen, on the other hand, leavens her "mom" persona with a direct approach that demonstrates her care for each student: "I tell them the truth. And I don't sugar coat, I don't beat around the bush, I lay it out. I lay everything out straight." Why? Because "I feel like I've gotten to a point where I'm pretty successful, both professionally and personally. And so I'd like them to get there, too."

Heeding the Hearkening

Does a common thread exist that draws these advisors to care for students? Each advisor has offered an initial glimpse into their reasons for care: a professional decision, an interest in students' abilities to deal with life beyond college, an interest in each student's individuality, or a desire to "repay the favor" in helping students achieve their own interpretation of personal success.

Perhaps the advisors, in their own unique ways, heed "the call of conscience" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 322), intuitively knowing that "Through caring for certain others, by serving them through caring, a man [*sic*] lives the meaning of his [*sic*] own life" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 2). "Intuition" is pre-ontological, according to Heidegger (1927/1962), a way in which the individual discloses to itself that of which it is capable. Such a disclosure Heidegger (1927/1962) labels as the "hearkening," a form of inner hearing that is

"phenomenologically still more primordial than what is defined 'in the first instance' as 'hearing' in psychology—the sensing of tones and the perception of sounds" (p. 207).

What, then, do the advisors hear in this hearkening? Perhaps they are responding to an inner voice, an uncontrollable impulse "which compels us to move our life in a certain direction, to make choices and to live out our lives in meaningful ways" (Berman, 1994b, p. 6). In following this hearkening, advisors understand that "Being called to care means having a voice and entering into relationships with the other—sharing the joys, fears, and darkness of others" (Berman, 1994b, p. 12). This sharing brings about a shift of consciousness from that of the "carer" to that of the "cared-for," in the realization of the "cared-for's" reality as feasible (Noddings, 1984, p. 14):

> When we see the other's reality as a possibility for us, we must act to eliminate the intolerable, to reduce the pain, to fill the need, to actualize the dream. When I am in this sort of relationship with another, when the other's reality becomes a real possibility for me, I care. (Noddings, 1984, p. 14)

Care, for the advisors, is a part of who they are, an entrenched human trait, fully imbedded by the spirit of Jupiter, the soil of Earth, and the shaping of *Cura*. How, then, is the legacy of *Cura* portrayed in the experiences of the six advisors?

Jupiter's Spirit

In Greek and Roman mythology, various interpretations exist regarding the creation of the human race. Jupiter is "the father of both gods and mortals . . . who upholds the highest moral values in the order of the universe" (Morford & Lenardon, 1995, p. 95). Through Jupiter, humankind is given the spirit to dominate the earth and provided "a lofty visage and ordered to look up to the sky and fully erect lift his [sic] face to the stars" (Morford and Lenardon, 1995, p. 57).

Jupiter infused the human created by *Cura* with his own spirit. As I write through the everyday experiences of six advisors, I celebrate the spirit in which they provide care, seeing the episodes of their lives in a clearer, deeper sense, perhaps even as something extraordinary:

> Seeing everyday life as holy is in part seeing the world and its contents as infinitely receptive to our activities of exploring, responding, relating and creating, as an arena that would richly repay these activities no matter how far they are taken, whether by an individual or by all of humanity together throughout its time. (Nozick, 1989, p. 60)

***Cura* as Nurturer**

Walter speaks directly to his concept of advising as nourishment: "It's like the old proverb, 'Give them a fish, feed them for a day, teach them how to fish, feed them for a lifetime.' I want to feed them for life." To "nurture," according to the word's Latin root *nutrire*, is "to nourish" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 715). To nourish is to provide sustenance, to replenish the needed nutrients in a timely

manner that allows the organism to continue to function. So, too, does care serve as sustenance for students, as advisors nourish through care and through an understanding of the regenerative powers of care, knowing that "Caring is something that we must continually redeem, retrieve, regain, and recapture each time we are called to be in caring encounters" (Hultgren, 1994, p. 180).

The universality of nurturing. In discussing what she has learned about first-year students, Miranda states:

> I used to think that it was all Black students that needed nurturing, and I used to think that it was all the financially poor kids that needed the nurturing, and over the years I've learned that that's not the case at all. It's all of them; if they're leaving home for the first time, they need nurturing for different reasons.

What set of circumstances has drawn Miranda to this conclusion, that all students need nurturing? Miranda explains that there is no "formula" for identifying students in need, because each student's mix of background and experiences is so different:

> They may not have the financial problem, or the educational problem, but they still may not understand some small thing that may make a big difference in their success here, or because they've been so nurtured at home, that leaving the nest is traumatizing, whereas kids who may be financially poor are used to operating on their own, who don't have a mother or a father at home. Kids who have a mother and a father, they feel detached when they leave and go to another town; they feel so detached that they go into depression.

Miranda asserts that "Nurturing, to me, is recognizing a need in students and proactively following up on it." As a result, she often steps beyond the bounds of "traditional" advising to offer care to

students. She recounts the story of Lydia, a student suffering from uterine cancer, who attempted to balance the demands of her coursework and the physically exhausting impact of a devastating disease.

> She [Lydia] has to take a lot of time off to go to Johns Hopkins to her doctors. And I've had instructors say to me, "Well, she should just go locally," and I tell them that they just don't understand, and I will go to bat for that young woman. She's doing what she needs to do: she's trying to stay in school and she's trying to keep her doctor's appointments, and she's willing to do the extra work outside of class. I will call any instructor and try to explain how crucial the doctors' appointments are. In a sense, I feel like I'm trying to protect her because there's only so much that she can bear.

Why has Miranda chosen to engage herself so fully in helping Lydia? From what is Miranda protecting Lydia? In later conversations, Miranda reveals that she also has experienced serious, life-threatening disease; now, Miranda helps to smooth the rough edges of Lydia's stressful existence, deflecting from Lydia as much pain as possible, understanding from her own personal experience what Lydia is experiencing. Miranda, through her care for Lydia, is "stepping into the anguish of the other and simultaneously suffering with the other" (Berman, 1994b, p. 13).

Friendship within *Cura.* Rachel, who admits readily that her approach to advising is still in the formative stage, explains that the foundation of her advising revolves around the concept of advisor as friend: "Someone who's accessible, someone who is trustworthy, someone who is consistent in terms of being there." Rachel's focus on

friendship returns to Gadamer's (1960/1975) original premise, that "Both the person who asks for advice and the person giving it assume that the other is his [*sic*] friend" (p. 288).

However, is friendship truly possible when advising first-year college students? How are the implied superior/subordinate levels of the advising relationship—the advisor as "authority figure," the student as "the advised"—transcended? Is there not an inevitable time when the artificiality of the relationship—the fact that the advising pairing is the result of an external matching and is usually short in duration—reveals the inherent fragility of the connection?

For Hannah, friendship is not part of the advising equation. "I'm not that interested in being their buddy," she states, re-emphasizing the importance of maintaining "a good professional relationship." Miranda also demarcates specific boundaries to emphasize her role as advisor and to accentuate her focus on self-responsibility, explaining, "I'm here for them if they come to me, but I don't pursue them." She observes pointedly that friends are often the cause of trouble for new students; as a result, her responsibility is to serve as a reality check, whether they want to hear it or not: "I always let them know that their behavior is going to produce a certain outcome, and if that's their choice, they need to be aware of it, but go ahead."

However, Andrew feels that friendships can, in fact, be developed in advising relationships. "I don't think we have to be the same gender, or the same age, or we don't have to be ready to go out and swallow goldfish and drink beer to be friends," he observes. A true friendship can be developed if both parties, no matter what age or background, "are in the process of being able to not only love and respect ourselves. . . [but are] able to love and respect other human beings as themselves." With his experience as an advisor and as a professional therapist, Andrew believes that friendships can evolve based on mutual care, no matter what place students may be in their lives:

> Care, as helping another grow and actualize himself [*sic*], is a process, a way of relating to someone that involves development, in the same way that friendship can only emerge in time through mutual trust and a deepening and qualitative transformation of the relationship. (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 1)

Thus, like the circle that is the clay spinning on a wheel, friendship carries us back to an expression of care. "Friend" finds its origins in the Old English *freon*, meaning "to love" (Barnhart, 1994, p. 409). "Love" is borne of the Old English *lufu*, "love," which in turn can be traced to the Proto-Indo-European *leubh-*, "to care" (www.etymonline.com). The establishment of friendship with students offers the quality of insight (Gadamer, 1960/1975), a premise of fundamental importance to friendship: "A person with insight is prepared to accept the particular situation of the other person, and

hence he [sic] is also most inclined to be forbearing or to forgive" (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 288).

Knowingness of *Cura*. Hannah often sees students struggling with meeting the rigorous requirements of a major in music. She speaks of a situation in which she intuitively knew that a student had needs she should address:

> I still saw this young man who needed more dialogue. I could see it; I had known him pretty well by this time. He needed to talk to somebody who cared about him and not just about weeding out majors for the program, because he had run into a lot of that. And I was the person that could talk with him. . . I needed to care about his future as a student, whether or not he made it as a music major.

What—and how—did Hannah "know" about this student? She knew, on one objective level, the external issues—the academic expectations of a particular major. This type of knowing, according to Berman et al. (1991), "is seen as coming from the individual in relation to the world" (p. 9). Hannah perceived that the student was at odds with the expectations of the academic world—her world. Yet, she intuited that the student needed to talk to someone, and that she was the person most qualified to help. How did she come to this understanding? How did she know?

The etymology of "know" may lead to a deeper understanding of how an advisor "knows." Although the concept of "know"—"to perceive or understand as fact or truth" (Costello et al., 1992, p. 750)—retains the same meaning in its Latin, Old Slavic, Old Irish,

Greek, and Armenian ancestors and relatives (Barnhart, 1988, p. 589), the premise of knowing as related to understanding is introduced through the contemporary definition of "know" in its emphasis on understanding. To "understand" means "to grasp the idea of" (from the Old English *understandan* [Barnhart, 1988, p. 1185]). Gadamer (1960/1975) tells us that "All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language which would allow the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter's own language" (p. 350).

For Hannah, then, her knowing arose from having talked with the student before, developing a knowledge of the student that provided a foundation from which she could sense the student's needs, thus leading to additional dialogue. Such dialogue, through language, becomes the advisor's mode of gaining knowledge. Andrew strongly feels that his best service as an advisor is talk to students, building a knowledge base that helps him to know students on a "personal, intuitive emotional kind of level." "It's that kind of knowledge you get from other human beings," he observes, when "they are sharing their hopes, their fears, their concerns, their pride, their pleasure, their threats, their frustrations." For Rachel, talking with students provides an excellent opportunity to feed her curiosity, a point illustrated as she recounts an exchange with one of her students:

> You know, you talk to students, and you get the little tidbits and facts. So I really like to get students to talk to me and tell me about what they're doing, who they are, and it's just fascinating. . . and it was neat to watch him, because as I was watching him and listening to him talk, I thought, "Wow! He's putting it together! He's making it his!" and I was thinking, "This is really exciting!"

Language, then, possesses "a power of significance entirely its own" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 182) because it opens the door to understanding. Knowing is realized through understanding, and understanding returns us to the provision of care. Understanding a student, "grasping the idea" of personal or academic issues,

> apprehending the other's reality, feeling what he [*sic*] feels as nearly as possible, is the essential part of caring from the view of the one-caring. For if I take on the other's reality as possibility and begin to feel its reality, I feel, also, that I must act accordingly; that is, I am impelled to act as though in my own behalf, but in behalf of the other. (Noddings, 1984, p. 16)

***Cura* in reciprocity.** In discussing the experiences of his first year of advising first-year students, Walter explains that, for him, advising is an act of reciprocity: "Students also give you as much as I give them, and that's the thing they don't realize. I learn more about myself and about people through my students." Each fall semester offers new opportunities for Walter to learn more about himself, because the new first-year students bring a slightly different type of energy and perspective than the previous years. For Walter, reciprocity is an integral part of the advising process:

> Not only do I need to continually learn to relate to them, I feel that I'm able to pull energy from them, ideas from them, world views that I may not be exposed to from them, and so I learn, I

> think, more about myself and about how I see the world through the eyes of my students . . . and I think that makes me a better professional and a better person.

Is this "moving backward and forward" (to re-visit the root meaning of "reciprocal") another component of care? Can the call to care be a call to receive care as well as to give care? This reciprocity of care may be a step on the path toward self-understanding for each advisor, for "Man [*sic*] finds himself by finding his place, and he finds his place by finding appropriate others that need his care and that he needs to care for" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 63).

Each advisor has alluded to finding that personal place where the providing of care to students results in the giving of care to the self, thus fulfilling Noddings' (1992) admonition that "To care and be cared for are fundamental human needs" (p. xi). Andrew, in recalling his first advising experience over thirty years ago, clearly recalls the joy he experienced in being able "to be outside of the process and see the potential for effect on the student's growth," explaining that "I love it . . . It gives me a sense of satisfaction, it feels good." For Rachel, her self-care is revealed in her excitement in working with students: "I'm doing the best thing in the world, and I have the best job in the world, and OK, what else can I tackle today?" Hannah finds personal pleasure in working with each student, for "It's reliving possibility all over again," explaining that she finds particularly gratifying "the

excitement for potential that feeds the care," while Ellen observes, "We all like to think we're making a difference."

When *Cura* Dissipates

"Caring is not always agreeable; it is sometimes frustrating and rarely easy" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 52). At times, the efforts of the advisors to engage in care have been blunted; some relationships never develop, and the advisor is relegated to being a dispensary of information or a signature on a course card. Our conversations reveal the reality of this aspect of care in the discussion of lost relationships.

To lose is "to perish" (from the Old English *losian* [Barnhart, 1988, p. 610]); to perish is "to die, be destroyed, come to ruin" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 778). "The process rather than the product is primary in caring," according to Mayerhoff (1971, p. 22). If the process "comes to ruin," the advisors no longer have an avenue through which they can exhibit care for their students.

Hitting the brick wall. Joseph, a first-year football player, had been a particular challenge for Walter. As a result, Walter prepared in greater detail for his upcoming meeting with Joseph than for sessions with other students, being sure that he had correct information well in hand about options and services that would regenerate Joseph's interests in college.

Walter spoke with Joseph at length about the academic expectations of an athlete. Walter wanted to create a spark of

understanding in Joseph that would clarify the connection between his desire to play football and the necessity of maintaining an acceptable academic standing. However, Joseph's impassivity to Walter's repeated inquiries finally took its toll. When Walter realized that Joseph was not going to respond, in any manner, to offers of help, Walter expressed, "[I] felt like the floor dropped out from under me and that I was the one who failed. I felt let down and I felt like I had really hit a brick wall."

In challenging Joseph, Walter sensed Joseph's opposition, a sense that led to a feeling of failure. "Hitting a brick wall" connotes an abrupt halt to a sense of movement. To "hit," according to the word's Indo-European root of *keid-*, is "to fall" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 484). Potters often take the same approach to their work: "I like to challenge the limits of the clay properties. I want to find out where the edge is before a piece collapses, to know if it can take pushing and pulling" ("Emerging Artists 2003," p. 73). For potters, the "pushing and pulling" can lead to failure as well, just as it led to failure for Walter.

To "fail" is "to be lacking or defective," when the Latin root of "fail" (*fallere*) is considered (Barnhart, 1988, p. 365). In our conversations, Walter tried to analyze the reason that he was unable to forge a connection with Joseph: "Was I perfect? Maybe, maybe not. Maybe I wasn't the right person to make the right connection

with him, but I tried what I knew." Perhaps Walter never fully knew Joseph, for knowledge of the cared-for is an integral part of the caring process:

> To care for someone, I must know many things. I must know, for example, who the other is, what his [*sic*] powers and limitations are, what his needs are, and what is conducive to his growth; I must know how to respond to his needs, and what my own powers and limitations are. (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 9)

Gadamer (1960/1975) reminds us again of the connection between knowledge and understanding, that "Meanings cannot be understood in an arbitrary way . . . If a person fails to hear what the other person is really saying, he [*sic*] will not be able to place correctly what he has misunderstood within the range of his own various expectations of meaning" (p. 238).

Ultimately, Walter attempts to be philosophical about his encounter with Joseph, explaining that although he still feels disappointed in the outcome, "I couldn't have done anything better. I tried my best with what I could do. . . I also obviously wasn't a match for him." However, in understanding that "Hindsight is better than foresight," Walter admits, "Going back and looking with a different set of eyes, it's easy to criticize yourself."

***Cura's* empty arms.** While the advisors understand that "The impulse to act in behalf of the present other is itself innate. . . [and] In caring, we accept the natural impulse to act on behalf of the present

other" (Noddings, 1984, p. 83), certain students and situations provide challenges to the advisors' commitment to care.

Hannah, for example, admits to feelings of resentment directed toward Roger, a first-year student who had been particularly challenging in terms of his ability to attend meetings. She had the strong urge to step outside her professional persona, "shake the student by the shoulders and say, 'Look, buddy, you're dreaming big, but you're not even being polite to the people who are going to help you get your dream.'" Andrew observes, "The students that I've had the most difficulty with are probably white, upper- to middle-class males or females—individuals who present with entitlement; you know, 'You're going to make it the way I want it to be, and it has to be the way I want it to be.'" Walter attempts to rationalize his feelings about certain students for whom he has no real affinity:

> Taxing is the best way to put it. It actually takes more energy than a regular advising experience because you're having to put aside the fact that you just don't care for this person's personality. . . You're not going to like everybody—you can appreciate people for what they bring to the table—but if I don't like a person, I just try to put that aside, and I tell myself that they're here and I need to try to help them as best as I can . . . There's definitely a feeling that there are other things that I could be doing that I enjoy a lot more. You know, you find yourself wondering if you want to give this person the extra "Is there anything else?" type of question, instead of "Thanks, see you."

"Not liking" a student is an emotional response; "Emotions often provoke deeper understanding" (Berenson, 1981, p. 145). Noddings (1984), in writing about care and the relationship between the carer

and the cared-for, observes, "In a given situation with someone I am not fond of, I may be able to find all sorts of reasons why I should not respond to his *[sic]* need. . .[Yet] here is this person with this perceived need to which is attached this importance. . . Shall I respond/how do I feel as a duality about the 'I' who will not respond?" (p. 84).

For the advisors, feelings about the "non-responsive I" include "trying to get on top of my anger and frustration" (Andrew); "I worry that it's something that I'm not doing well enough, but the scientific side of me says you can't win them all" (Ellen); "Grow up; I see right through you" (Miranda). Rachel identifies a feeling of frustration "when the kids are coming and you just sort of cringe and say, 'Oh, no, not again,' or not *that* student. I always feel really guilty about that, when I get that feeling of 'Oh, no, it's the one who asks the really strange questions.'"

Mayerhoff (1971) reminds us that "Guilt tells me that something is wrong; if it is felt deeply, understood, and accepted, it provides me with the opportunity to return to my responsibility for the other" (p. 25). Rachel is aware of this authenticity in the giving of care: "Right after I feel that dread, I try to remember that they come to me for a reason, and I must have somehow touched a nerve with this kid that they feel that I'm open enough that they can talk to me. And then that usually makes me feel pretty good."

***Cura*: Beyond Clay?**

In her reflections, Ellen poses a question that continually nags at her self-perception as an advisor:

> I am sometimes also very concerned that I am giving good advice. Some students carry a lot of baggage, both personal and academic. I struggle with feelings of inadequacy in these situations. I am not a trained psychologist or counselor; I am a biologist with no real training in advising other than the academic rules of the road.

Ellen's concern is indicative of the feelings shared by the advisors when the helping relationship intensifies to a level that that they perceive approaches the constructs of counseling. Working with students on non-academic matters causes the advisors the most consternation, because they worry whether or not they have the abilities to help a student with a personal problem.

"Rules of the road," as Ellen mentions, connote a feeling of security with direction, surroundings, and mode of transportation. For the advisors, the direction of academic advising seems clear—to help students navigate the various policies and program requirements of an undergraduate degree. The surroundings make sense—pursuit of a post-secondary education on the campus of a four-year public institution. And the mode of transportation offers comfort—a knowledge of rules and expectations that are part of the academic advisor's repertoire of information. Yet, like the potter who hesitates to work in a different clay or to try a different firing technique, the advisors also show their trepidation in dealing with students' personal

dilemmas. In fact, Rachel observes that, to engage in a counseling relationship, "It takes a special person to be able to designate that kind of energy to that, and I know I don't have it."

An inadequate potter? All the advisors but one see dealing with personal issues as an act requiring a particular set of helping skills. When faced with potentially serving as a counselor to a student, the advisors often question their own personal abilities:

Ellen, in reflecting on problems presented by her students: "I am a scientist with no real training. What am I doing advising students about their lives?"

Miranda, in establishing definite parameters for each advising relationship: "I basically told her [a student] that she had to get a counselor to help her; I was just not equipped."

Rachel, on worrying that a student will want to discuss a subject that she, as an advisor, feels unprepared to handle: "I didn't want to cross the line because I am not a counselor. I don't do that work and I don't want to do that work. A lot of time I struggle with crossing over into the counselor role; that's my nature, but (a) it's not what I'm trained for; (b) that's not what I need to be doing; or (c) that's not the best way I can help them."

Walter, in discussing the feelings of dealing with students' personal problems: "It feels like you're drowning, is the best way I can

describe it. You're gasping for air, for ideas, because that student is looking for something and they've entrusted that to you."

Hannah, in expressing her discomfort with students' personal issues: "Sometimes I don't want to hear or to think about some of the things they're telling me. . . I feel my blood drop from my head down into my gut."

No hints regarding the advisors' hesitancy to engage in actions they perceive as counseling are offered in the etymology of the word "counsel," which emerged from the Latin *consilium*, "deliberation" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 227). To deliberate is to "consider or to weigh in the mind" (Costello et al., 1992, p. 358), actions which are part of any advising lexicon, a connection seen clearly in Love's (2003) stated goal of advising: "to generate learning, growth, and self-determination, in addition to sharing information, opinion, and one's accumulated wisdom" (p. 507). The issue of the act of counseling entering an advising relationship seems to be predicated on personal interpretation of the levels of help that an advisor feels comfortable in providing. Where, then, do the advisors draw their own lines regarding what they feel capable of discussing with students?

The intention beyond clay. Andrew, as a professional therapist, is the only advisor who is comfortable with the issue of counseling within the context of advising. He observes, "In advising, we have a frame around the relationship, around the process. The

frame around that process is academic pursuit . . . In counseling, the parameters are set by the individuals who are involved in that process, and not imposed from without."

Andrew's interpretation of the difference between advising and counseling introduces the concept of intention. Entering into a counseling relationship results in an intentional agreement between an individual and a trained therapist, based on a "voluntary and confidential process . . . in which counselors and clients jointly participate in problem resolution" (Nugent, 1994, p. 5). The intentionality of the relationship, when coupled with specialized training, become the features that distinguish counseling from advising. All the advisors except for Andrew feel that they do not possess the "Well-developed skills and extensive knowledge in interpersonal helping [that] are essential tools in . . . responses and interventions" (Winston, 2003, p. 504). Consider, for example, the depth of issues presented to Rachel by Billie, one of her students:

> She [Billie] has an eight-year old sister who she's adopted, and she is now the legal guardian of the eight-year-old sister. She [Billie] came into school having taken the high school special program where she was a licensed assistant nurse, and she's doing the two-year nursing program here to finish that out, so she's already got part of a nursing degree. We weren't supposed to know this, and she's very, very slender so it's hard to tell, but she was six months pregnant when she got to school, and she had the baby last week. Her plan is to finish school in two years on her scholarship and raise her baby and take care of her sister. Her mother is somehow back in the picture, even though her mother doesn't have guardianship and is taking care of the baby and the sister for the next year while she

> [Billie] finishes her degree—and how this girl is managing, I don't know.

Rachel recalls her adamant desire, in her role as advisor, to provide care for Billie, but she was fearful that she could not meet Billie's needs, recalling thinking that if Billie began to cry, "There's a good chance that I'll start crying, too, because I don't know how to help."

Same clay, different potter. "I don't know how to help." Rachel's words reflect the feelings of other advisors when they realize that they have broached, in their relationship with their advisees, subjects that they feel uncomfortable discussing. For several of the advisors, referring students to the university's counseling center emerges as an option.

Ellen explains how she handles a situation in which a referral seems to be the most logical recourse:

> As soon as I get to the point that I'm beginning to worry, "Am I doing this well?" the counseling center gets brought up. I usually say, "Hey, we're at a point where I don't think I'm wise enough and I don't want to mess this up." I mean, I really do say that to them. "I think that you need professional help and I'm not qualified." I'll say, "Oh, my goodness, I think we need to get you some really good help here." And they usually respond.

Ellen is very comfortable in referring students, explaining, "I can listen, but I think that the folks at the counseling center have way more experience with that kind of stuff than I do, so I've done the right thing."

Walter knows that when he feels "overwhelmed with a person and the problem," a referral is the best option for the student. He shares his inner dialogue:

> OK, we've pulled the tricks out of the bag, and we've worked with this person, and it hasn't gotten better; it continues to worsen or become more difficult. . . OK, I can't do any more, it's getting serious, more than it normally would be, and now I'm a little lost at this point.

Walter tries to assess each situation and ultimately to do what he thinks is best for the student, noting, "To be fair to this student, I have to get someone else to help."

Of all the advisors, Miranda is the most uncompromising in her decision to make a referral rather than to engage in any sort of a counseling session with a student. Although she holds a master's degree in counseling, Miranda establishes specific boundaries around her advising role, saying, "I can't set up counseling appointments to get into all that . . . I'm only one person; I don't have time. I don't want students dependent upon me to the point that they can't function."

The ability to refer students to professional counselors offers the advisors a certain level of solace in dealing with the stress, confusion, and fear associated with working with a student's personal issues. For Rachel, the comfort of having a referral agency available "just in case" helps her to assess each situation:

> You sort of take a deep breath to make sure that the questions you're asking are enough to let them know that you care and to

> give you any information so you can steer them towards the counseling center, but at the same time not go so far that they're completely splayed open and vulnerable.

Is the establishment of a referral, the "handing off to someone else" as the act is described by Hannah, the cessation of care? Has the act of care been abrogated? In realizing that others could be better trained to deal with personal crises, does the advisor remove care? No, according to Noddings (1984), who, in her discussion of the obligations of care, confirms that the offering of care is shown in the sincere consideration of the most appropriate options for each student:

> Caring requires me to respond to the initial impulse with an act of commitment: I commit myself either to overt action on behalf of the cared for . . . or I commit myself to thinking about what I might do. . . But the test of my caring is not wholly in how things turn out; the primary test lies in an examination of what I considered, how fully I received the other, and whether the free pursuit of his [*sic*] projects is partly a result of the completion of my caring for him. (p. 81)

<u>Understanding the potter's limits</u>. However, the question still remains: Why are the advisors averse to helping students with personal problems? That they have entered into a caring relationship with the students is evident. Possibly, the hesitancy comes from the implied transiency of the advising relationship; as Noddings (1984) observes, "There is a legitimate dread of the proximate stranger—of that person who may ask more than we feel able to give" (p. 85). Other reasons may exist, each as different as the advisors themselves: a level of frustration with a particular student; a feeling of

skittishness based on previous attempts to help; or a fear of adding more pain to a student already in the throes of anguish or depression.

Do advisors restrict themselves from offering a higher level of care because they have such discomfort with a student's situation that they cannot look beyond their own emotional response? "In the past decade, there have been substantial increases in the number of students who enter college with serious mental health problems and illnesses," according to Winston (2003, p. 485), who cites such concerns as sexual assault, drug use, alcohol abuse, and eating disorders. If the student's issues emanate from actions as a result of serious issues such as these, and the advisor has a strong negative response, then the advisor may consciously choose, due to personal discomfort, to refer the student. However, Mayerhoff (1971) warns that such a removal of a student's legitimacy results in an abrogation of the caring relationship:

> If I do not basically experience the other as someone or something in its own right, then, whatever else may be going on, I am not caring. . . To determine whether I am caring, I must not only observe what I do, feel, and intend, but I must also observe whether the other is growing as a result of what I do. (p. 28)

Does an issue of self factor into the type of care that an advisor provides? Heeding the call "involves interpersonal relationships based on a thorough knowing of self so that one is confident enough to be able to reach out to others" (Berman, 1994c, p. 169). The knowing of

self, however, may not be a foregone conclusion, for the self is a growing and developing entity:

> Because our lives continue over time, we can experiment and try out choices or modify them. We also can pursue some traits intensely without having to forego others permanently; these can await another time. We thus can aim to have a self that develops, one that over time includes and integrates the most important traits. This may explain the sense in which certain tasks and traits are most appropriate at certain ages or stages. With many to be fitted in over time, some may be done more fully or easily when they come before (or after) others; some sequences may flow more easily than others. (Nozick, 1989, p. 129)

If the self continually grows and changes, taking on another person's personal issues may be beyond the coping abilities of advisors, all of whom are at various points of development in their own lives. Berman (1994a) reminds us that "Persons called into human service professions frequently feel the need to deal fully with their own meanings and longings so that they can be more fully present to others" (p. xi). To be "present," according to the Latin root of present—*praeesse*—is to "be before, be at hand, take the lead" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 834). For these advisors, "taking the lead" in intensely personal issues may set off an internal alarm—an alarm that is often disconnected only with the referral of the student to the campus counseling center.

***Cura*'s Many Clays**

> And we could all open our eyes at once
> And see one another
> Right then we'd be in heaven. (Gibbs, 1969, p. 805)

Advising of first-year students embraces—and should celebrate—identity and difference: difference in students based on race, sexual orientation, gender, socio-economic class, or religion. Yet advising in a multicultural, diverse society brings voice to the advisors' concerns that their inability to understand adequately students different from themselves will hamper the true provision of care.

The advisors also understand that the demographics of their university and its locale heighten the importance of providing authentic care. The university has an enrollment of approximately 4,500 undergraduate students, of which approximately 950 are first-year students. Of the first-year students, 24% (228) are self-identified as Black or as representative of a minority group. These students are enrolled in a university which includes among its 250 faculty and staff five faculty and two professional staff of color (three Black members of the faculty, two Asian American members of the faculty, and two Black members of the professional staff). As a result, concerns surface periodically regarding the university's ability to provide positive role models for its students of color.

***Cura*'s hesitant hand.** In our conversations, the advisors often struggle with the concept of difference and how their concern for showing care affects their presence in the advising relationship. Walter admits that he felt "less comfort, particularly in the early

stages" when he first began advising students who present themselves in difference.

> I had to work hard to try and find common connections, and it wasn't about personal things: it was things about the university, common connections about where they lived on campus, or what they were doing on campus, or different experiences here. . . It was uncomfortable because I didn't want them to think I was trying too hard and being superficial or fake.

Walter indicates that he knows intuitively that his status as a male from a middle-class family disallows any competent understanding of the experiences of Black or Latino or Asian students. As a result, he attends to the student as an individual person. "Every person is different—and I'm different—so I need to focus on each person individually, to find out what they need, where they're going, what they can handle, that type of approach."

Walter alludes to an understanding that he, too, is different in the eyes of the students with whom he works. Does this understanding lead to a fuller relationship? Does Walter provide authentic care?

> Being authentic means being open, being willing to engage in self-disclosure. To disclose means to unveil, to make manifest, to show. It means having the courage to Be in the midst of a threat to Being. It means interpreting what is self-disclosed and using that understanding for responsible caregiving. In taking risks, in revealing self, possibilities are opened for more authentic encounters with students. (Slunt, 1994, p. 60)

At its etymological core, "authentic" means "one acting on one's own authority" (Barnhart, 1988. p. 65). To act on one's own authority is to

take responsibility for personal actions. Heidegger (1927/1962) first speaks of the concept of authenticity when he discusses the concept of Being-with-one-another:

> When they devote themselves to the same affair in common, their doing so is determined the manner in which their Dasein, each in its own way, has been taken hold of. They thus become *authentically* bound together, and this makes possible the right kind of objectivity . . . which frees the Other in his [*sic*] freedom for himself. (p. 159)

Thus, such a dual authenticity means that each participant is present within the individual self that interprets—the individual Dasein.

However, does there exist another level of authenticity, an authenticity of the single self? Heidegger (1927/1962) explains that the disclosure of self-authenticity ultimately is revealed through relationships with others:

> The Self of everyday Dasein is the *they-self*, which we distinguish from the authentic Self—that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way . . . As they-self, the particular Dasein has been *dispersed* into the 'they' and must first find itself . . . If Dasein discovers the world in its own way . . . and brings it close, if it discloses to itself its own authentic Being, then this discovery of the 'world' and this disclosure of Dasein are always accomplished as a clearing-away of concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up of the disguises with which Dasein bars its own way. (p. 167)

The unveiling of the authentic Self thus provides the understanding of "the primordial Being of Dasein itself—namely, care" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 169). For the advisors, their authentic selves appear through their acts of care.

The other's point of view. Noddings (1984) asserts that authentic caring "involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the other's. . . When we care, we consider the other's point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us" (Noddings, 1984, p. 24). However, is stepping into another person's frame of reference really possible? Ellen discusses the difficulties she encountered in trying to understand the contexts of a student's life:

> There was a Black student who was being raised by her grandmother because her mother was a drug addict. I get scared—no, not scared, I get nervous because to me this is a kid who needs to be handled well, who needs to be advised well. . . I don't understand her world, I don't want to be patronizing, yet there is no way that I can be cool, not in their world. I mean, I don't know how.

Ellen admits that the student's life is one that she cannot comprehend and, although she fervently wants to give care, she worries that she is unable to make the necessary connections with the student "because I'm trying to be something I'm not."

Rachel very carefully handles her questioning of students, emphasizing that she is most concerned with how she is perceived in her offering of care: "If they see me as someone who is privileged or is like, 'Poor you,' sort of condescending, then they won't feel comfortable coming to me if they need something." As a result, "I try to ask the questions that will benefit them, and not just satisfy my own curiosity, because a lot of times I catch myself, not from the standpoint of 'dish the dirt,' but more 'that's so foreign to me.'" Her

self-talk carries its own set of reprimands, as well: "I try very hard not to let shock at something show, or when I do say something, it's like 'God, do you think before you talk?'"

To counteract this possibility of embarrassment by naivete, Rachel's internal monologue often accelerates to a "fast forward" speed when she works with students of color. Cognitively, she identifies issues of socio-economic status as a greater gulf to be bridged than that of race; however, she understands that she carries inside her certain suppositions that she must consciously suppress. "I don't want to embarrass them by saying, 'Well, who do you live with, your mom or your dad?' I'm assuming their parents are divorced, and I catch myself saying, 'Don't say that.'" Rachel often will infer that there may be some sort of abuse in the household, but then castigates herself for allowing her stereotypes to presume such a volatile conclusion without really knowing the student's situation.

The tyranny of hidden prejudice. A "stereotype," according to its French root, is "solid type" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 1066). "Stereotypes profoundly affect human behavior, particularly interracial communication, for they determine how we react to and interact with environmental stimuli" (Rich, 1974, p. 43). Stereotyping is most often based on visible clues or on individual self-identification, and the judgment from the stereotype is generally negative (Axelson, 1999). Gadamer (1927/1962) writes of "the tyranny of hidden prejudices that

makes us deaf to the language that speaks to us" (p. 239). He observes that prejudice is "a judgment that is given before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined" (p. 240). The root of the word "prejudice"—the Latin *praejudicium*—means "opinion formed in advance" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 832). Thus prejudices and stereotypes are inextricably linked in the pre-judgment of others.

Ultimately, issues of being present in the face of difference are questioned by Gadamer (1927/1962), who asks, "Does the fact that one is set within various traditions mean really and primarily that one is subject to prejudices and limited in one's freedom?" (p. 245). Originally, "tradition" meant "delivery, surrender, a handing down" from the Latin *traditio* (Barnhart, 1988, p. 1156). Gadamer (1927/1962), then, asks if beliefs that are "handed down" create a system of prejudices which then hamper individual growth and enlightenment. He provides no answer to his question, but alludes to the importance of knowledge of self in his observation that "Prejudices of the individual . . . constitute the historical reality of his *[sic]* being" (p. 245).

Do the advisors bring their own stereotypes into their advising relationships? Hannah observes that she grew up in a society in which material wealth was a factor in the development of social perceptions: "I look at society sometimes as 'Where's the old money?'

and 'Where's the new money?'" As a result, she is aware of her immediate suppositions regarding socio-economic class because "There's certain things you understand, whether or not you think it's such a great idea to go around labeling." Miranda, in discussing common characteristics of first-year students, indicates that she has particular issues with "some of those rich White males whose goal is to just drink their way through their freshman year." When pressed for an explanation of her "type-casting," Miranda explains that, in her experience as a Black woman working with white males, "These kids do not have consequences, and the parents are just over-supplying."

Different clays, same approach. Not all the advisors claim feelings of deficiency when faced with perceived cultural differences. Andrew, a white male in his mid-50s, states, "I don't know why, but usually I connect very well with minority students and I work very hard at that." In clarifying his answer, Andrew offers insight into his commitment to the potential of each individual, and the power that comes from that commitment:

> It's an experience that is separate from, I want to say the identity of the person that you're involved with, because it's the exact same experience that you could have with somebody of a different gender, or a different race, or a different age, or different sexual orientation, or whatever. None of those things matter. It's that thing that goes on between those two people right at that moment. That's the power I'm talking about: two people, same place.

Although Miranda has some specific feelings about the conduct of many white males with whom she comes into contact, she also is

sensitive to the fact that her race generates different types of relationships, connections that are often positive in nature:

> [Black students] tend to ask me more personal kinds of things, and the white students tend not to, but they tend to come in and talk to me about, for example, "I have my first Black roommate and I'm not handling it well," or "My mother's not handling it well," or "I'm the outsider in my residence hall wing, and there's six kids in my group who are Black and I'm not fitting in and I feel like I'm being treated like a hick." So we tend to bond, but on different topics.

While the advisors struggle with their abilities to present themselves in care, their words reveal that they continue their commitment to caring for their students, regardless of race, gender, sexual preference, or cultural background. Through their concern for their students, they have demonstrated an understanding that "The man [*sic*] who cares is genuinely humble in being ready and willing to learn more about the other and himself, and what caring involves. This includes learning from the one cared for as well" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 16).

Earth's Body

> About Earth, I will sing, all-mother, deep-rooted and eldest, who nourishes all that there is in the world: all that go on the divine land, all that sail on the sea and all that fly—these she nourishes from her bountifulness. (Morford & Lenardon, 1995, p. 42)

In this passage from the *Homeric Hymn to Earth, Mother of All*, the centrality of the earth to creation and to humanity is confirmed. Morford and Lenardon (1995) observe that "mother earth" is the first diety; O'Dohohue (1997) reminds us that, according to Celtic myth,

"Fashioned from earth, we are souls in clay form" (p. 2). The body, then, becomes the connection to the universe, a vessel that *Cura* possesses for its lifetime.

What experiences perpetuate the advisors' connection to this ancient universe? Merleau-Ponty (1962) reminds us that "Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism [for] it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly" (p. 203). In what ways do the advisors, through their everyday experiences in advising, sustain the presence of this "visible spectacle"?

***Cura*'s Celebration in Body**

When working with a student who responds in a positive manner to the assistance offered, Miranda identifies a feeling of "high adrenalin;" Walter likens the feeling to "a neat little pat on the back"; Hannah explains that being thanked for her help gives her a feeling "Pretty much like I've been given a Pulitzer Prize!" and Ellen notes a "feeling of pride, of accomplishment."

Comments such as these illustrate the advisors' awareness of their bodies and the additional insights offered in the provision of care to students. The primacy of the body is universal in the everyday-ness of life:

> There are millions of calls, a thousand summons, most likely a daily herald. We get up and go or we don't. We turn, sniffing the wind, looking for signs. The mind doesn't help. It's the body that knows, that tells me when the direction is right:

> heart thump and stomach churn, the warmth spreading across my chest, steady steps, the expansiveness, the way I'm in love with the world. (Hurd, 2001, p. 136)

The body also brings its presence to the advising relationship through its service as the vehicle by which a dialogue is initiated and through its visceral responses to language contained in the dialogue. Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes the interplay of body and word:

> It is my body which gives significance not only to the natural object, but also to cultural objects like words. . . Words have a physiognomy because we adopt towards them, as towards each person, a certain form of behavior which makes its complete appearance the moment each word is given. . . My body is not only an object among all other objects, a nexus of sensible qualities among others, but an object which is sensitive to all the rest, which reverberates to all sounds, vibrates to all colours, and provide words with their primordial significance through the way in which it receives them. (p. 235)

Merleau-Ponty tells us, therefore, that our body reacts first, of its own accord, before our thought process supersedes the body's response. Ellen identifies this reaction as one of comfort, for when she sees her students, even before talking with them, "It feels warm, it feels good, it feels like I'm happy to see them, and they're happy to see me."

***Cura*'s ancient connection.** In what ways do advisors experience the "primordial" interface of word and bodily response? In our conversations, the concept of "connection" is most often used as the term to represent this nexus: a feeling of "connecting" with a student, of reaching a point in a dialogue where they are "joined together" (from the Latin root *connectere* [Barnhart, 1988, p. 208]). An awareness of that point, according to Andrew, surfaces when

"You're talking to a student and you realize that somehow we are both on the same page, that we are coming from the same place." Walter equates this feeling of connecting with a student to a sense of euphoria: "I can go home and I feel complete," he explains. "I have a feeling of being successful, of doing what I am supposed to be doing."

To experience the sensation of euphoria, in its contemporary definition, is to achieve "a strong feeling of happiness, confidence, or well-being" (Costello et al, 1992, p. 461). As Rachel describes the euphoria she finds in that moment of connection with a student, her motions become animated, her eyes sparkle, and she exudes the persona of an individual who has just experienced a moment of transcendence:

> I get a wicked rush . . . when all of a sudden—it's like an ah-ha moment—when all of a sudden you see them realize that they have a responsibility and that they're in charge. It's like—you know, if you ask me what a muscle feels like, I'd be much better off than if you ask me what an emotion feels like—it's tingly, but it's not that fine-tuned. It's like a rush of energy, but it's not like your fingers tingle when you're excited and anticipating something. It's like an energy burst that goes—you know how you see a little kid and their face lights up in a smile? It's *that* feeling, it's that radiance that just kind of pops. . . you can feel it, and it's almost like you wish you could stop time for that second, because it's just that rush and then it's gone. And then you go back and then you think about it again, and it makes you smile. You get that little smile in the corner of your mouth; you know, you think "I did something righfor that person at that time."

The smile to which Rachel alludes—"The smile, the act, the relationship . . . hung in space, in the immediacy and purity of the present; suspended on the still point of here and now; balanced there,

on a shaft of air, like a seagull" (Lindbergh, 1991, p. 74)—is a body memory. Body memories are those "intrinsic to the body, to its own ways of remembering" (Casey, 2000, p. 147). The smile manifests the memory of "being in the situation itself again and feeling it through our body" (Casey, p. 147).

The transcendance of *Cura*. Andrew is the advisor most attuned to the physicality of response that can occur when a connection is made with a student. To explain his feelings, he uses an analogy of the tumbling interrelationship of a set of Chinese balls often used to maintain digital dexterity:

> I have a set of Chinese balls—you know, the kind that you use to exercise your hands and fingers—and when you use them appropriately at the same time, not only do they make a tone, but the two tones will reinforce each other, and it's almost like there's a chord sounding. And as long as you can keep the balls going in synchronicity, the tones continue. It's really powerful to feel that, and to sense that . . . that's when all those beautiful things occur, that's when you get those funky feelings up and down your spine and the funny things going on in your stomach, and you kind of get a shaky little sweat going on, and it's "YES!" This is just so damn powerful.

Calling the personal growth of students "experiences of transcendence," Andrew speaks passionately about his desire to help students, explaining, "I will do what I can to help someone toward that process of enabling them to experience" a heightened level of self-awareness.

To "transcend," according to its Latin ancestor *transcendere*, is "to climb over or beyond" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 1159). Existentially,

"Transcendence is firstly the relationship between being and Being starting from the former and going toward the latter. Transcendence is . . . that *highest being itself* which can then also be 'Being'" (Heidegger, 1958, p. 57). A concern for others moves beyond—transcends—its most basic level to elevate itself to care, which "the Being of Dasein in general is to be defined" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 157). Andrew thus believes that the power of such a transcendent experience will enlighten students on the importance of individual self-determination.

***Cura* in the present.** This euphoria, this connection, this time of care—an episode that Hannah describes as "very much in the moment"—highlights the act of care through fully being present with the student. "In caring the present is not cut off from vital connections with the past and the future, for it is informed by meanings and insights from the past and enriched by anticipations of the future, such as the promise of new growth" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 22). This presence "is not what is evanescent and passes but what confronts us, waiting and enduring" (Buber, 1923/1974, p. 64). Merleau-Ponty (1968) describes this point of connection as the instant when,

> Suddenly there breaks forth the evidence that yonder also, minute by minute, life is being lived: somewhere behind those eyes, behind those gestures, or rather before them, or again about them, coming from I know not what double ground of space, another private world shows through, through the fabric of my own, and for a moment I live in it. (p. 10)

The bodily response in advising reveals another aspect of care—natural care. Noddings (1984) observes, "In situations where we act on behalf of the other because we want to do so, we are acting in accord with natural caring" (p. 79). To "want," according to its etymology, links back to the Old Icelandic *vanta*, "to lack, deficient" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 1218). The bodily responses of the advisors to their giving of care reveals a desire to complete a circle of caring: "Besides the other's need for me if it is to grow, I need the other to care for if I am to be myself. . . I do not try to help the other grow in order to actualize myself, but by helping the other grow I do actualize myself" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p.22).

Yet the universality of human experience indicates that not all visceral, bodily responses are positive. What of visceral reactions of fear, of inadequacy, of anger? What of the interior response that is based on lack of feelings? Do not these inner reverberations obstruct the ability to care?

Hobbling *Cura*

Noddings (1994) reminds us that "Ideally, another human being should be able to request, with expectation of positive response, my help and comfort. If I am not blinded by fear, or rage, or hatred, I should reach out as one-caring to the proximate stranger who entreats my help" (p. 101). However, "fear, or rage, or hatred" are strong human responses, responses that may surface in some version

in any advising relationship. As a result, engagements with students that are not positive in nature generate their own set of bodily responses, feelings that often hobble the process of care.

***Cura* and fear of mistakes.** Walter explains that during his first advising experiences he felt "terrified because I didn't trust myself to know the school's academic system." He speaks of his fear that any incorrect advising on his part could have caused a permanent scar on a student's record, a fear that ultimately manifested itself in "profuse sweating and a nervous shuffling between the undergraduate catalog and the schedule booklet."

The word "experience" grows from the Old Latin *periculum*, "risk accompanying an attempt, peril" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 357). In his experience, the "peril" of his initial advising meeting, Walter felt fear, which has the same root meaning as "experience": "danger or peril" (from the Old English *faer* [Barnhart, 1988, p. 372]). To experience, then, can be interpreted as a fear of the outcome, a risk of failure. Through experience an individual is introduced to limitations:

> Real experience is that in which man [*sic*] becomes aware of his finiteness. In it are discovered the limits of the power and the self-knowledge of his planning reason. It proves to be an illusion that everything can be reversed, that there is always time for everything and that everything somehow returns. (Gadamer, 1927/1962, p. 320)

Walter's fear, then, is real, as illustrated in his bodily response. He feels strongly that any misstep as an advisor could cause irreparable harm to a student's record, an incident which could not be reversed.

Andrew recalls the feelings that preceded the arrival, in 1972, of his first advising appointment, as he struggled with meeting the challenge of the responsibility that he had been given: "For me it was very threatening, it was very uncomfortable, because the concept at that moment is limitless, that the only limit on me is what I put there . . . but then that's a horrible responsibility." He explains that ultimately the advising appointment was successful; in fact, "I still periodically hear from her; she just calls to tell me how her life is going."

Hannah brings to advising her own set of fears: a fear of being able to perform the functions of an advisor. In speaking to her frustrations about the scope of knowledge required, Hannah states, "It makes me feel inadequate to do the job, because I just don't know the ropes well enough. . . I'm definitely afraid of routing someone into the wrong math class, or letting them drop a required English class." She then pauses, laughs long and hard, and says, "Sometimes I think it's hilarious that I'm an advisor. I mean, 'Why would you want advice from me?'"

A diminished *Cura*. Hannah may ask why a student would want her to give advice. Yet, what happens when an advisor's attempts to give advice, to offer care, are rebuffed? Andrew identifies the feeling of obstacles being mounted to his efforts to provide care as "emasculation, of impotency on my part." He tries to control his

feelings of anger and frustration when a student resists any offers of assistance or advice. As a result, Andrew likens the experience to a non-rewarding factory job:

> I am feeling more like the unappreciated labor on the assembly line, that, yes, I am providing work but there is no value, no worth, no reward in providing this, but I still will provide what it is that is to be provided to the best of my ability because it's my job, my function.

Andrew's feelings are based in an emotional response to the students. But because "intense and fitting emotions make us more" (Nozick, 1989, p. 95), Andrew channels his feelings toward helping the student understand the impact of the actions taken:

> I will share my frustration, my feeling of being unable to help them in ways that would be really appropriate as a function of the way I'm feeling. . . I know that the feeling is mine and that it is my responsibility. I'm not doing it to be cathartic; I'm doing it to give feedback to the individual . . . out of respect for myself, my discomfort or disrespect for the way that they have treated me.

Andrew exhibits care of a different kind in centering on his feelings; "Being centered means sensing both self-awareness and responsibility to one's community" (Lashley, Neal, & Slunt, 1994, p. 206). In his awareness of and expression of his feelings, he has opened the student to an understanding of the impact of personal action. Andrew's outreaching offers a kind of care that "provides a center around which . . . activities and experiences are integrated. This results in a harmonizing of the self with the world that is deep-seated and enduring" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 13).

For other advisors, dealing with resistant students is not handled in the same introspective manner as Andrew's. Ellen, as the scientist, analyzes the episode and tries "to figure out what I would have done differently." Rachel, as she completes her morning run, often re-lives a negative engagement with a student, ultimately feeling that the encounter is a result of her own doing:

> I'll re-run the scene in my head, both verbally and with a little mental imagery work, to see how I will react next time that will be more positive. . . Usually, I feel like I'm at fault, and then I try to take a step back and look at the situation, because even if they're adults, they're also children . . . I try to let myself off the hook a little bit, but I don't do that very well. It's funny how they stick with you, isn't it?

***Cura's* self-talk.** In expressing concerns about her ability to negotiate the many academic policies and procedures required to earn a degree, Rachel relates, "I felt really nervous about messing them up, because I know that everybody comes back and says, 'Oh, my advisor messed me up' and I didn't wantto do that." In fact, the feeling of "messing up"—which for Rachel, externalizes itself as noticeable lapses between sentences that are punctuated by several "uh's"—creates such an internal conflict that Rachel argues with herself about her decision to become an advisor, engaging in a heated self-conversation about choices and consequences:

> You can either keep doing it or this can be your last semester; you can weigh pros and cons. Nothing comes that's 100% happy time, so is it worth it? Well, yes, it is. Then how am I going to deal with this? You took this job, for better or for worse, this semester, and this is part of it. Are you going to

cope with it, or are you going to be angry about it, which is pointless?

Rachel's internal dialogue engages her as both speaker and listener. As listener, she cultivates "a practice of the self which enables us to listen to our own body of felt needs and hear what they are calling for" (Levin, 1989, p. 38). As speaker, she engages in "the experience of thinking, in the sense that we present our thought to ourselves through internal . . . speech" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 177). As Rachel debates her situation, the thought "move[s] forward with the instant and, as it were, in flashes, but we are then left to lay hands on it, and it is through expression that we make it our own" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 177). Rachel's conversations with herself ultimately are a form of care for self, for "It is also through caring that we move toward ourselves. It is through caring that each of us is revealed and known. . . We identify ourselves through care, and we are defined by our caring. Thus, our caring constitutes our being in the world. . . Care involves us in the world" (Lee, 1991, p. 180).

***Cura's* determination.** A potter often makes the same form dozens of times, understanding that the personal will to continue working in clay must transcend the many obstacles facing the clay spinning on the wheel. This personal will, this care for the clay, serves as the factor which drives the potter forward in spite of bad glazing, incorrect firing, or inadequate building. As potters' commitment to their art serves as the spirit which allows them to

transcend unexpected barriers and frustrating delays, so too does care—authentic care—provide the foundation on which advisors continue their work with students in spite of the often-unexpected responses of their advisees. Potters continue to shape the clay, and by extension, themselves. Much the same could be said for the experience of the advisors, for through "shaping" students, they often attend to their own needs.

***Cura*'s Shaping**

> My subjects are the people around me—men, women, young, old. I see these bodies as vessels for our inner selves . . . They are shaped from the inside by our wants, needs, fears, desires. Formed by our past, our present, our future. Through these bodies, I record us, and ultimately myself. ("Emerging Artists," May 2003, p. 76)

As *Cura* shaped the form of human and filled it with her own essence, contemporary potters seek to imbue their own work with a sense of self, for "Each one of us is doomed and privileged to be an inner artist who carries and shapes a unique world" (O'Donohue, 1988, p. xvi). As a result, the act of artistic creation, like the giving of care, engages the needs of the potter and the advisor:

> Caring itself expresses a broader meaning . . . as the overcoming of an attitude that sees others as existing simply to satisfy my own needs, and treats others as if they were merely obstacles to overcome or clay for me to mold as I please. (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 17).

Care, then, is a symbiotic relationship, for "There is a selflessness in caring . . . for the other, in helping it grow" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 21). Originally, the concept of "grow" was focused on plants,

as seen in Old English *growan*, "to flourish, develop" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 453). Helping students "grow" as individuals is an important component of care within the advising process, a responsibility held in deep regard by the advisors, for "To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him [*sic*] grow and actualize himself" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 1). Advisors also realize the symbiotic nature of helping, in that through care-giving to students, they themselves grow as individuals: "Through caring and being cared for man [*sic*] experiences himself as part of nature; we are closest to a person . . . when we help it grow" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 63).

The Teaching *Cura*

When asked to describe her response when a student thanks her for the help provided in an advising session, Hannah replies, "It's rewarding when I see them make a good choice, which is like all of teaching." The word "teach" has as its root the Old English *taecan,* "to show" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 1118). What is being shown in the teaching within advising?

Teaching as vocation as advising. Huebner (1987) refers to teaching as a vocation; "vocation," in its original Latin iteration of *vocatio*, means "a calling" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 1209). Individuals who choose to teach are responding to a calling, a beckoning that "can mean the power of naming. 'A call' can mean the power of purpose. 'Being called' can mean the existence that is signified by naming, as

well as the fuel for action that is fired by purpose" (Lashley, 1994, p. xvii). Buber (1947/1962) identifies teaching as service, chosen based on an individual's "own character" (p. 49), using individual traits to "devise something new in the light of the teaching and of service" (p. 49). To "serve," as based in the Old English *servan*, is "to be useful to" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 987). Thus, individuals who choose teaching respond to the call of purpose and of service.

But how can advising be called teaching? Teaching connotes classrooms, student lists, lesson plans, homework, and summer vacations. Perhaps the connection is found in the concept of vocation. Advising also may be considered a vocation in the sense of its calling, a calling identical in purpose to that of teaching. Accepting advising and teaching as vocations, then, is "being prepared to accept newness and surprises; pain and happiness; for it is these dimensions of the world that make us rethink, almost daily, who and what we are" (Huebner, 1987, p. 19). Advisors, like teachers, reflect "the making of meaning and values . . .participat[ing] intentionally in the unfolding . . . of this social world" (Huebner, 1987, p. 21). This unfolding is illustrated in the different ways in which the advisors engage in care through teaching.

***Cura's* focus on the individual.** For Walter, that which is being shown in teaching through advising is his acceptance of responsibility for each student's growth. He explains, "Every student I

try—and again, sometimes I'm better with certain students than with others, and I know it's not always perfect—but I definitely try with all my students to be a teacher for them, or an influence of some kind." This responsibility is a form of stewardship for Walter: "I take personal ownership in that you being the student, your care has been entrusted to me in the sense of guidance and support as a representative of the university."

Why does Walter claim to be in a teaching relationship with students? To teach is to provide an education. "Etymologically, at the source of education is *e* [out] + *ducare* [to lead] (a leading out), suggesting the possibility of enownment, a coming into one's own becoming in the realm of possibilities" (Aoki, 1991, p. 62). An advisor, then, promises to lead a student toward personal growth and discovery. This aspect of advising is important for Walter, as a student affairs professional, because he feels that education, the "leading out," includes "what we do outside the classroom experience" and that these experiences are "important and impactful for students."

***Cura* resolute.** Teaching moments in advising are individually created, according to Miranda, when she ascertains the needs of each student: "I'm usually able to teach them what they're doing. I really go into, not an anger mode, but a teaching mode." Although Miranda recognizes that teaching can be an important component of advising,

she is adamant that any care provided through teaching is shown through her forcing students to engage in self-reliance. "I abdicate my role to them; it's like, not let me help you, but let me help you help yourself."

To acquire a deeper understanding of the concept of helping students move toward helping themselves, I turn to Heidegger and his concept of solicitude. For Heidegger, solicitude—a translator's interpretation of the German *fursorge*—is different from "care or concern" (the original meaning of the Middle French root, *solicitude* [Barnhart, 1988, p. 1032]). Rather, the original German *fursorge* is best interpreted in a positive sense as "taking care of the children" (Heidegger, translator notes, p. 157). In this case, writes Heidegger (1927/1962), solicitude can *leap ahead* of the Other,

> Not in order to take away his [*sic*] 'care' but rather to give it back to him authentically as such for the first time. This kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care—that is, to the existence of the Other, not to a *"what"* with which he is concerned; it helps the Other to become transparent to himself in his care and to become *free* for it. (p. 159)

Thus, solicitude is "bound up with its Being towards the world of its concern, and likewise with its authentic Being toward itself" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 159). For Miranda, this authenticity in care is important because "I don't want to shelter them from getting the true essence of growing up."

Refuge in *Cura*. Can teaching in advising offer the advisors an occasion to re-embrace the essence of being with students through

care? Hannah recalls a particular time—in fact, as she was attempting to be on time for one of our conversations—when she realized that advising and teaching shared the same focus:

> I was late tonight because this excellent student of mine wanted some feedback, and I wanted to leave . . . I obviously hadn't given him enough feedback, or hadn't been satisfied, or he wanted more. And I could have closed the door and said, "I have to be at a meeting," and I did start edging toward the door, putting my purse on my shoulder and everything. But sometimes when that moment happens—you know, I had had such a bad day. I was just "meetinged" to death: meetings during my office hours, meetings during my classes, I was supposed to be in three places at once at one point in the day—that I sort of . . . took refuge in it. I thought, "Wait a minute—this is what I'm supposed to be doing; this is teaching." I think in some ways there's a kind of solace when that happens . . . maybe it's the peace that is so satisfying that you actually put some of your grown-up responsibilities aside for a minute and get into it.

Hannah speaks of "taking refuge" in her advising, of feeling a sense of solace, an atmosphere of peace. "To take refuge" is to be protected from danger or shielded from trouble; a sense of "solace" provides a "source of consolation or relief" (Costello et al., 1992, p. 1273). Etymologically, "refuge" is borne of the Latin *refugium*, "place to flee back to" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 902); "solace" owes its meaning to the Latin *solari*, "to console" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 1031). Advising, for Hannah, thus becomes a returning point for personal consolation, for relief from the administrative and academic pressures of her professional role. That Hannah is a musician is appropriate, for her showing of care illustrates her understanding that her students "complement me, they enable me to be complete, somewhat as playing

music enables the musician to be himself [*sic*]" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 42).

And what of the peace that Hannah finds satisfying? "Peace," as a word, has had the same meaning from its contemporary definition and back through its iterations in Old French and Latin: "tranquility, absence of war, silence, quiet" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 767). This peace is a personal achievement in care:

> Through finding and helping to develop . . . others, I discover and create the meaning of my life. And in caring for . . . others, in being in-place, I live the meaning of my life. . . The specific need certain others have for me, if they are to grow, makes it possible for me to live the meaning of my life. (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 45)

Dickinson (1967) provides a more poignant interpretation of finding the meaning of individual life:

> If I can stop one heart from breaking,
> I shall not live in vain;
> If I can ease one life the aching,
> Or cool one pain,
> Or help one fainting robin
> Unto his nest again,
> I shall not live in vain. (p. 18)

As I consider Dickinson's words, I think of the responsibilities each advisor shoulders, including advising of first-year students as part of a hectic roster of responsibilities. Andrew serves as a full-time therapist and manages an office for veterans' services, while Hannah teaches a full load of four courses, studies Spanish, represents the dean of her college at state meetings, and performs as part of a musical trio. Rachel teaches both health and computer science,

coaches, and serves as a consultant on biomechanics, and Miranda, in addition to teaching a psychology course and directing a student services center, serves as a lay deacon for her church. Ellen balances teaching four science courses, chairing an academic department, and singing in the university's chorale. Yet each of them identifies the completeness that they feel when they advise students. Have they found, like Hannah, a solace in advising? Chadwick (2002) speaks of the comfort she finds in clay: "Pottery . . . has always been my safe place, a place where I could retreat from stress and enter my own little world of clay. Claywork invigorates my mind and calms my heart" (p. 126). Does the work with students provide the advisors such a sense of calm so that they can engage authentically in the act of care? Are the advisors, in presenting themselves in care to the students, the manifestations of Dickinson's words?

Students and the Emergence of *Cura*

Richards (1962) expresses her reverence for the firing that transforms each clay vessel:

> How the pot, which was originally plastic, sets into dry clay, brittle and fragile, and then by being heated to a certain temperature hardens into stone. By natural law, as it were, it takes final form. . . . Then, the form once taken, the pot may not last, the body may perish; but the inner form has been taken, and it cannot break in the same sense. (p. 20)

Care for a student often manifests itself in the advisors' attention to the "inner form" of students, helping them learn the importance of self-responsibility so that they will have a strong

foundation, much as the firing process hardens the clay. "There is a hope that the other will grow through my caring," writes Mayerhoff (1971, p. 18), for such hope is grounded in the care the advisors give during the short time they are with students, a care that is "an expression of the plenitude of the present, a present alive with a sense of the possible" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 18).

Responsible in *Cura.* To have self-responsibility is to "be able to respond" (from the Latin *respondere* + *-ible* [Barnhart, 1988, p. 918]) to issues of self. That the individual is able even to complete this task is a concept that occupies a position of prominence in humanity:

> The self is a dynamic psychological system, a tapestry of thoughts, feelings, and motives that define and direct—even destroy—us. . . Because of humans' unique capacity for self-reflection, a complex web of emotion, intention, and evaluation gives rise to the most salient aspect of human experience—selfhood. (Hoyle et al., 1999, p. 1)

The concept of self is explored in Heidegger's (1927/1962) pursuit of the essence of Being. The premise of Being within the human entity is identified by Heidegger as Dasein. "Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence—in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself" (p. 33). Andrew discusses his observation of the development of self (and, by existential extension, Dasein), in reflecting on hundreds of advising encounters: "I take great pride in watching students stand up for themselves, to make a

decision on their own, take responsibility for that decision, even if it's an unpopular decision, and move on with their lives."

Perhaps the discovery of self in each student signals the start of a spiritual journey. O'Donohue (1998) writes, "Once the soul awakens, the search begins and you can never go back. From then on, you are inflamed with a special longing that will never again let you linger in the lowlands of complacency and partial fulfillment" (p. 7). Walter alludes to the importance of such a search when he explains that helping students is "to help them develop the ownership, the responsibility they need to carry them on beyond here." Miranda keeps track of many of her first-year students as they leave her to move on to the next stage of their search, writing in her personal reflection, "Attending graduation and mentally revisiting the trials and tribulations of students as they cross the stage brings tears to my eyes and sends goose bumps down my arms."

Rachel offers a circumspect view of her contributions to each student's search for self-responsibility. Her curiosity about her students often leads her to "guess" where they will be going or what they will be doing.

> So I often think that even when I get frustrated, I know I'm not necessarily trying to reach them today, but if I can plant the seeds and they can come back to it, maybe when they're 25 instead of when they're 35, I'll be just tickled.

***Cura* and service to the other.** To "serve" is "to be useful to," a definition buried in its etymological history (Barnhart, 1988, p. 987).

Miranda emphasizes the usefulness of the advising relationship in her adamancy that she will work with any students who are willing to try to help themselves, "as long as they're willing to put in the effort." Part of her advising approach in working with these students could best be described as a selective non-sharing of information. "Sometimes the lesson is not in what you do, but in what you don't do," she explains, offering the anecdote of a student who was failing all of her classes. The student ultimately passed, but

> I didn't follow behind her and call her and remind her that she had this class, and, you know, just baby her and nurture her to the point that I'm going to be her mother. . . She didn't get there because of what I told her; she got there because of what I didn't tell her, or what she didn't receive.

Perhaps Miranda, in focusing on students' abilities to help themselves, achieves with each student the contribution that Buber (1923/1947) calls the Rung of Service:

> This is the service man [*sic*] must perform all of his days: to shape matter into form, to refine the flesh, and to let the light penetrate the darkness, until the darkness itself shines and there is no longer any division between the two. (p. 49)

***Cura* in competition.** Walter describes the experience of helping students discover their own abilities of self-responsibility as the excitement of not knowing the final outcome of a competition, explaining that "I'll focus on that and they'll come up with their end goal. That's more important to me: The excitement, the rush comes more with knowing how to help them find their own end. To me that's what it's about."

Initially, the concept of competition carries a negative connotation of winners and losers, yet the word's etymology offers a different insight: "compete," from the Late Latin *competere*, originally meant "to strive in common" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 197). In the competition that Walter describes, he and the student actually "strive in common" to reach the "end goal" of personal insight and a heightened sense of self-understanding. Gadamer (1960/1975) calls such understanding "a genuine experience, i.e., an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth" (p. 445).

The passion of *Cura*. For Rachel, the true moment of being present in helping students toward their own self-discovery comes in a shared passion:

> There's the opportunity that I can be passionate, and I think that that's the moment that I really feel connected with them, and I can really feel alive and just excited about being there and . . . they have a good feeling that this is what they want to do, or they figure out what they don't want to do, that's the moment that I can be passionate about what I do.

"Passion," according to its etymology, has as an earlier meaning "emotional," borrowed from the Medieval Latin *passionatus* (Barnhart, 1988, p. 761). At that point of connection, Rachel feels she is fully present in the relationship, her emotional response making the moment "more valuable, more intense, and more vivid" (Nozick, 1989, p. 95). Gadamer (1960/1975) says that "Human passions cannot be governed by the universal prescriptions of reason" (p. 23). Rachel has

no particular, quantifiable reason for her impassioned response; she simply knows that "it just feels right."

The Shaping of the Potter through *Cura*

> It seems that the potter and his craft had had a special aura from the earliest times. Pottery is the ancient ur-craft, earth-derived, center-oriented, container for nourishment, water carrier. Experiences of centering and of personal metamorphosis grow within the craft. (Richards, 1962, p. 34)

Richards brings us back to the legend of *Cura* and her unique attachment to earth and to spirit. However, *Cura's* story leaves out an important component: Did she herself have "experiences of centering and of personal metamorphosis" as a result of the creation of humanity? Perhaps it is presumptuous to ask that a myth offer to us a three-dimensional character study. However, the concept poses some interesting suppositions. Did *Cura*evolve as humanity evolved? If so, what type of changes would she have experienced?

Perhaps other yet-to-be-revealed myths may tell us of *Cura's* journey toward self-actualization. However, in her descendents—in the six advisors who have conversed with me about their experiences—stories of personal insight and growth have been brought forth, confirming that in the giving of care the advisors themselves are recipients of care.

***Cura* and potentiality-for-Being.** Before I engage in the exploration of the selves of the advisors, the existentiality of self within the context of care is in need of exploration. Heidegger

(1927/1962) maintains that "the Self belongs to the existential . . . attributes of Dasein" (p. 365); thus, "Selfhood must be conceived *existentially*" (p. 365). Selfhood is imbedded in care, for "Care summons Dasein towards its ownmost potentiality-for-Being" (p. 365). Thus, "Selfhood is to be discerned existentially only in one's authentic potentiality-for-Being-one's-Self—that is to say, in the authenticity of Dasein's Being *as care*" (p. 369). Ultimately, care continues to serve as the grounding agent in which Dasein can conceive its full possibility.

The potter's self. "A self thinks about itself, about what others think of it, about its impact on others, about what others might say about it, about how to present itself to others" (Nozick, 1989, p. 47). The questions posed by the advisors show their concern for these aspects of self: Am I doing a good enough job? Do the students feel that I am providing them the help that they need, or that I think that they need? Am I presenting myself to students in such a way that students are accepting of me?

In some cases, the finding of self is a reflection of personal purpose through a career choice. "The self is not infinitely elastic—it has potentials and it has limits. If the work we do lacks integrity for us, then we, the work, and the people we do it with will suffer" (Palmer, 1998, p. 16). This interconnection of self and work serves as

the grounding on which Walter made fundamental decisions about his professional life:

> My calling is to impact the world that I live in and to impact the students that I work with. . . That's what I do, and so when I'm able to see the results of the fruits of my labor in the sense that they get things or they grow or I've made a connection or they've said I've made a difference in their lives, that says my life is worth something and my work is worth something.

Impact connotes a collision of objects, a sudden halt, an unplanned stop. Originally "impact," in its Latin root *impactus,* meant "to push into, to strike against" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 510). Walter's ideal reverberates within the world of the potter, for the potter "pushes into" the clay, understanding that the slightest shift of the finger, a gentle emphasis of pressure in a particular point, will give to the clay an unexpected texture or shape, an impact perhaps unseen until the completion of the firing process.

Other advisors care for their selves in different ways. Hannah, for example, meets her own needs by developing relationships with students in ways that engage her ability to help: "If I can teach them that if they start 'wigging' out and don't know what to do, then that's the time to call me." Ellen explains that the care for self found in advising is divulged in feelings: "I feel good about doing the job most of the time because I truly care about them." Rachel accepts that she has a need to be remembered, explaining, "I wonder what kind of impression I'll leave on them, if anything will kick in two years or five years or ten years from now." Andrew, in his focus on service to

students, observes that advising is "a manifestation of my values, because I value that process." Miranda softens her stance somewhat when she discusses the personal fulfillment found in advising:

> Working with freshman students and being able to see them mature into young adults is what gives me the rewards I need to work diligently in advising students. I guess you can say that when I meet a freshman I am looking ahead to see what that student can become.

Pots yet thrown. David Bradley, an Arizona potter, explains how his work with clay serves as a vehicle for continued understanding of self:

> In working with clay over the years, I have learned things about myself—how to have patience, how to be more accepting of myself, how to be nonjudgmental. I've recognized the virtue of focused attention over the long term in order to gain a broader view of things. I have accepted the need to see simple things simply, in order to then deal with more complex issues. (Brown, 2003, p. 81)

Bradley sees, in his clay, an evolving self, one that continues to learn and to accept. Through his contemplations, he presents his self for continued care. Mayerhoff (1971) echoes the importance of this introspection, equating the ability to care for others with successful self-care: "I can only fulfill myself by serving someone or something apart from myself, and if I am unable to care for anyone or anything separate from me, I am unable to care for myself" (p. 35).

Is it possible that providing care also serves as a process to address unfulfilled personal desires? Nozick (1989) contemplates the efforts of self-discovery that an artist's work may reveal, as the forms

of clay or the strokes of the brush represent the conscious—or unconscious—cries of a self in need of attention or development:

> The creative work and product comes to stand, sometimes unconsciously, for herself [*sic*] or for a missing piece or part, or for a defective one, or for part of a better self. . . The process of shaping and crafting an artistic work has, as an important part of its impulse, the reshaping and integration of parts of the self. Important and needed work on the self is modeled in the process of artistic creation, and symbolized there. . . The artist herself can represent in her audience's mind a way and possibility of articulating and transforming a life and self. (Nozick, 1989, p. 38)

Is the act of advising an effort to discover a part of the self? How does such an interest in self-revelation affect the care given the student? Can self-discovery become the focus of the experience, thus blunting the impact on the student?

***Cura* as savior.** Miranda, throughout our conversations, maintains her aloof demeanor, reminding me that she is not advising in order to win friends, but to inculcate self-responsibility, often telling students, "I'm here for you if and if you need me, great; and if you don't, that's fine, too." However, Miranda allows a glimpse of an unmet need through her focus on "saving" students. She cites specifically that the students with whom she works pose a particular challenge: "I'm usually dealing with really troubled kids. These are kids that if I don't do something or say something really soon, they're probably going to flunk out of here, or get kicked out for some bad behavior." She revels in the challenge of these students and feels clarity of purpose in her advising "because for the most part I'm trying

to save students. So when I save a student, I *save* a student. I've made a difference and I know it."

Miranda, in "saving" students, often opens her home to them or becomes involved in their lives in a way that transcends academic advising. She relates the story of Tyrone, who selected her to reveal, for the first time, that he was gay. Tyrone explained, too, the reactions of his family when he told them. His father beat him severely, leaving him "in a pool of blood;" his parents disowned him and would not allow him to enter their home. The parents also removed Tyrone from their health insurance, leaving him with no medical care. During his first year, he struggled to balance attending his courses and working to support himself. Knowing herself, knowing that "it's things like this that just break my heart," Miranda provided Tyrone the support and encouragement he needed; in effect, "I saved him, and I know it."

Miranda's actions in support of Tyrone are contradictory to earlier comments in our conversations about "not being used" by students. Why does Miranda feel such a strong need to "save" students? Is Miranda being "used" by Tyrone? Does Miranda select only particular students to "save"? Why? From what is she saving them? Does such saving cause a dependency in the students, the same dependency to which she has expressed such a strong aversion?

In considering Miranda's conversation, I wonder why she has chosen the word "save," as oppose to "help," or "assist," or even "advise"? "Save," as a verb, carries strong connotations of rescue, building from its earlier Latin meaning, in *salvare*, as "to make safe, secure" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 960). Memories of my childhood and of being raised in a Baptist church also brings to mind another connotation of "save"—one of salvation. Edelmen (1988) writes of the political language of the helping professions, noting that language has "a profound part in creating social relationships and in evoking the roles and the 'selves' of those involved in the relationships" (p. 112). For what reason, then, does Miranda select such a volatile word to describe her actions, a word that possibly could "reinforce popular beliefs about which kinds of people are worthy and which are unworthy" (Edelmen, 1988, p. 113)? Why is Miranda casting herself as such a strong figure in these students' lives?

Perhaps the reason for Miranda's need to "save" students may be found in a comment made during one of our conversations, as Miranda reminisces about her own experiences as a student:

> I remember from my own experience as a freshman that there were things that I didn't understand, and nobody explained them. It's like I had to just figure it out and nobody really took me under their wings as a freshman, and there's just so many things that you can save a student from if they just understand.

Miranda floundered as a student, offering no positive memories of her experience. Now that she is in the role of advisor, she does not want

another student with needs to feel alone. By meeting their needs, she is meeting her own, for "In caring I commit myself to the other; I hold myself out as someone who can be depended upon" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 25).

The need for acceptance in *Cura*. Hannah, the quintessential professional, who has freely admitted that she is not interested in developing friendships with her students, still desires a positive relationship. "I want them to like me," she observes, "but I've been around long enough to know that it's OK if they don't, as long as they trust me."

Is "being liked" part of the provision of care? Is the presentation of care enhanced if the cared-for "likes" the caregiver? For Ellen, the concept of "being liked" is important, for of all the advisors participating in my conversations, Ellen is the most direct about her personal needs. She laughingly observes, "We all like to be loved, and I'm a Capricorn, man. Capricorns are the worst. Capricorns have this need to be loved, or at least it seems that way. We go to all kinds of ends." After our laughter subsides, her tone becomes more serious as she explains that the "school mom" persona provides her an avenue to engage with students in a way that will allow her to be accepted in a "liking" relationship.

To what extent is "being liked" important to Ellen? In her written reflection, she grapples with the issue of wanting to be liked:

> I like to be liked, and I feel good when I genuinely like a student and feel the liking returned. Therein sometimes lies some difficulty. Do I try too hard to be liked? I enjoy it when they come up with a nickname for me, but it is too familiar? I sometimes struggle with this issue.

"Liking" equates with "pleasing," according to the former's etymology (Barnhart, 1999, p. 596). Ellen mentions that she goes "to all kinds of ends" for acceptance, for the opportunity to please is, within its word history, "to be accepted or approved" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 805). Buber (1962) notes that such a reaction—the need for acceptance—is part of the natural order of human society:

> In human society at all its levels persons confirm one another in a practical way to some extent or other in their personal qualities and capacities . . . The basis of man's [*sic*] life with man is twofold, and it is one—the wish of every man to be confirmed as what he is, even as what he can become, by men; and the innate capacity in man to confirm his fellow men this way. (p. 67)

However, does going "to all kinds of ends," as Ellen describes her approach to being liked by her students, compromise the advising relationship? Does a personal desire for acceptance compromise the impact that an advisor has when a student may need blunt words, a "reminder of reality," or even a reprimand? Berman (1994c) observes that the purity of care in a relationship can be impacted if one of the participants has unmet needs:

> Persons who have not had opportunities to uncover who they are or to find their own voices may not enter into life with others in as rewarding a way as those who through a variety of opportunities have come to know themselves—have come to know what and who calls them to care. (p. 163)

Ellen's need to be liked epitomizes Berman's observation—that in the process of uncovering who she is, her calling to care is still in the formative stage.

The jealous *Cura*. When she thinks of her age and the inevitable change in the type of relationship she will have with her students, Rachel admits, "I'm jealous of them because I see everything that they're going to do and all of their options." Rachel presents an unexpected need as an advisor: a need to be a student again, to have the opportunities open to students for exploration. This desire is coupled with her need to *not* "come off as 'the establishment' . . . I don't see myself as a part of it, but they do." Rachel needs fervently to not be considered as "the establishment" of administration, of authority, of rules and policies.

Such an admission reveals a self still in the act of formation, for to be "jealous," in its original meaning, is to be "characterized by fervor" (from the Latin *zelus* + -ous [Barnhart, 1988, p. 551]). Her fervor, in this case, to "be" one of the students, creates, in Heidegger's (1927/1962) interpretation, a fleeing: "Dasein's primality of the 'they' and its absorption in the 'world' of its concern, make manifest something like a *fleeing* of Dasein in the face of itself" (p. 229). This fleeing is a turning-away, a falling "that is grounded in anxiety" (p. 230), an anxiety that reveals itself as its "Being towards its ownmost

potentiality-for-being—that is, its *Being-free for* the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself" (p. 232).

This existential stance reveals itself in later conversations with Rachel: her unsettledness with her current employment status (working on a semester-by-semester contract), her feeling that she is "underemployed" (having just earned her doctorate). In her "jealousy" of her students, Rachel sees that they are unlimited in their potential, free to do whatever they wish, and that her choices so far in her life are reducing her options. "I just see all the things that they can do, that they're free to do what they want," she observes in a tone best described as bittersweet, "and I just think, I wish I was there again."

***Cura* Amorphous**

In their sharing of the pleasures, the challenges, the fulfillment found in advising first-year college students, the advisors with whom I have held conversations have revealed the fundamentality of care to their experiences. However, as I write my way towards an understanding of their stories, I find that I am still searching for "the theory of the unique" (van Manen, 1990, p. 7). What particular portion of the care advisors present to students is, in fact, unique? What distinguishes the caring in advising from the caring shown in nurse to patient, parent to child, partner to partner? The primary purpose of phenomenological inquiry is "to uncover what there is about . . . an experience which is essential (or necessary) if . . . the

experience is to be recognized at all" (Clifton, 1963, p. 9). I have not yet recognized the essentialness of first-year advising, that which makes advising unique. In search for this essence, I continue to write and re-write, digging deeper for the answer to my query.

The Beauty of Free Fall: The Essence of First-Year Advising

Walking my two dogs each morning provides me 30 minutes of introspection before the day begins. On this particular morning, I am absorbed in thoughts of my research. As I make my way through the early morning fog, pulling my dogs to the road's curb as an auto approaches and passes, I rummage through my accumulated thoughts, reviewing my impressions of first-year advising gleaned from hours of conversing and writing. I find myself returning to Rachel's observations about first-year students feeling "free to do what they want."

Suddenly, I stop, my dogs jerked backwards by my abrupt halt. I quickly finish the walk, half-running through my front door and, after unleashing the dogs and tossing them their dog biscuits, I rush to my study to record what I have discovered.

Significance in Brief Encounters

Each of the advisors brings to the presentation of care a different viewpoint, a different set of life experiences, a different roster of priorities in advising first-year students. I understand, too, from my own experience, that advising first-year students, even though the

engagement is usually transient in nature, can be a celebration of "brief encounters [that] are the punctuation of life, the experiences that give emphasis and meaning to what otherwise might make no sense at all" (Coleman & Edwards, 1979, p. 9). However, I now realize that one central theme has recurred time and time again: The value that each advisor places on giving care to students at one particular time in those students' lives, that "blink of an eye" time when the students, free from responsibility, consider unlimited opportunities and unexplored potential. Is this "moment" the essence of the experience of advising first-year college students?

Hannah's exploration of "fun" in advising introduced to our conversations the thought that the uniqueness of first-year advising may be found in its confluence of advisor, student, and timing. In attempting to offer a simile that could help me understand her enthusiasm for advising, Hannah explains her penchant for folk dancing:

> Folk dancing, for instance, is something that I love to do . . . but I do it so much that sometimes I forget to sit down and re-visit that it's just fun, and people are skipping around with their arms linked. And so that's how enthusiasm is to me: it's like square dance.

As she continues her exploration of the fulfillment she finds in advising first-year students, she identifies the time for her that, like a square dance, is fun and full of inspiration:

> All these students, each one has this soul that I get to help develop, kind of like, your parents are the keepers of your soul

> to a certain age, but in this age—between childhood and adulthood—I think it's exciting. They've got the world by the tail; they've made it to college, so they've obviously shown that they can do something. Everything is possibility, and that is fun for me.

A skilled potter intuitively "knows" that point in time when a vessel, turning on the wheel or appearing from coils or slabs, reflects the care given to its preparation, for the raw material is poised in a state of becoming. No manipulation, no pinching, no slight pressure from the potter's hands has yet directed the clay toward a conclusion. The clay awaits the next step, the potter knowing that at this point in time the clay's potential is limitless. Advisors intuitively know that they engage with first-year students in much the same way. As is the case with the clay momentarily suspended in a state of yet-to-be, **the essence of advising is revealed in the advisor's being with students during that brief moment when students are open to the possibilities that college offers in personal growth and exploration.**

<u>The Moment's Essentialness</u>

How is this moment of connection defined? Is the essentialness of advising found in a single exchange, a flicker of a smile, a feeling of warmth in response to a student? Merleau-Ponty (1962) reminds us that human-to-human interactions occur—as between the advisor and the student—"because each one knows itself only by projecting itself into the present where they can interweave" (p. 433). At what

point, then, of this interweaving does the essence of advising first-year students present itself?

Each advisor visualizes the essentiality of the experience—the being present with students during a moment of limitless options—in a specific way, identifying in their own terms the phenomenon that without it advising would not be the experience that it is. For Ellen, the connection at this particular point in time is like a "clean palette." Walter elaborates upon Ellen's art analogy in his description that students at this fleeting point in time are "clay, unformed, generally open and ready to take whatever form is possible." He adds, "They're all at the starting gate; they're all full of possibility." Miranda takes a more circumspect approach, re-confirming her stance that her advising of first-year students is because she intuitively knows when she needs to step in and "save students from themselves."

Andrew celebrates the variability of first-year students at this point in their lives. "I walk into an upper-level class to give a presentation," he states, "and I'm talking to people who've already begun shaping themselves." But working with first-year students during those few moments of unencumbered-ness "really turns me on" because "they begin that whole process of realizing that there are major decisions that they are making right now that are going to affect them the rest of their lives." Andrew flashes a wide, sincere smile and says, "That openness, that potential to move in any direction, I find

tremendously rewarding and fulfilling for me because I see that as a big part of my function—not to develop them, but to help them develop them."

Hannah offers an interpretation almost jarring in its dissonance, in comparison to the other advisors' interpretations of the essence of advising. "As we move through life, and as we begin to experience loss," she observes, working with first-year students "is almost like the opposite of that loss experience." What does Hannah feel is being lost? The other advisors speak of potential, of opportunity, of blank pages and empty vessels both waiting to be filled. "Loss" connotes a reduction, a subtraction, a possibly permanent removal of something held important. What experience has brought Hannah to this interpretation?

As Hannah reflects on the episodes of her own life, she reiterates her commitment to working with first-year students during those few moments when they are "newly born" to the possibilities that their lives hold. As our conversation grows to a close, she offers an explanation of the experience of loss and how it impacts her understanding of students and, ultimately, her giving of care to first-year students:

> At that age they have the world by the tail. They can be anything: They can be a doctor, even if they can't handle blood, at that moment. But as you get older and your choices get limited, especially if you've lost someone or something really important—like, I watched my mother go through a divorce, and she lost something big. . . She had less companionship because

> she was living alone, and it was really, really sad. And I've seen people struggle with different kinds of life situations, and I can only say that those freshmen that show up have the exact opposite of that sadness that comes with loss.

Jumping at 18,000 feet. Rachel, in explaining her feelings about the essence of first-year advising, brings to the table a comparison to sky-diving. Skydivers call the plummet from an airplane, at heights approaching 18,000 feet, the "free fall": the rocketing to earth as a result of gravitational forces, maneuvering the air currents in a rapid descent towards the ground below. A novice skydiver shares his passion as he describes his first free-fall experience:

> Awe-inspiring. Existential. Exhilarating. Beyond fun. Cathartic. Serene. Exhausting. Numbing. . . .
>
> Falling. . . I felt us falling fast for a few seconds and then we had reached terminal velocity and it was as though we were floating, traveling at 120 mph and free falling for about 75 seconds (from 18,000 to 6,000 feet).
>
> Flying. There was a moment when I felt I was in a Zen-like state . . . It is the feeling I cherish most about this experience and it is the feeling I want to experience again and again and again!
>
> And then just as I was thinking, "I hope the parachute opens," there was a dead calm as it felt everything had just stopped. . . As soon as the parachute opened, I missed the free fall. . . I could've gone on free falling forever. (Samudrala, n.d., http://www.ram.org/ramblings/philosophy/skydiving.html)

For 75 seconds this diver felt a freedom, an exhilaration that released him from responsibilities, that allowed him to write, "This definitely was an existential experience for me. . . I think the meaning

of life is that we're alive and we're aware of what we are. And as I was free falling, I became aware of that with an extremely keen sense of sharpness." In this first free-fall, the diver jumped "in tandem" with an experienced instructor. The instructor thus shared that 75 seconds: an instant *in* a lifetime, but a meaningful experience *for* a lifetime.

In understanding the impact of the free fall as a moment shared by student and diving instructor, Rachel's comparison carries a special poignancy when discussing the essence of first-year advising:

> It's that very brief moment when they're in free fall, when they no longer see themselves as necessarily a son or a daughter because now they're away, and they don't belong to anyone or anywhere, and you just have so much you can do with that energy, because they're not connected, they're not a frat boy or a cheerleader yet, they're not anything yet because they don't know. It's just a neat, neat place to be, to help them.

Thus, the spirit of *Cura* pervades the experience of the advisor, the potter, and the skydiver in free fall. An advisor shares that special time in a first-year student's life, being present in care with students as they explore their possibilities—just as a potter is present with a mound of clay, and the instructor is present with the first-time skydiver.

***Cura* Within**

I sit back in my desk chair, thinking of the words I have written in my search for the essence of the experience of advising first-year students. I find myself pondering, in turn, many of the new first-year

students that became my advisees during the fall semester. I understand, and embrace, the feelings that surface—a combination of concern, of interest, and in some cases, melancholy—for I know that I care about these students as individuals, as students with whom I have intersected during their own "free fall" time:

> Ashley, the quintessential "homecoming queen, cheerleading captain, and school favorite" who struggled with becoming anonymous in college after four years of high school popularity, now finding her way in her decision to major in theatre.
>
> Lane, the jovial student in the back row of my class who reluctantly admitted that "I prefer drinking to studying," who was re-admitted to school on probation, now meeting with me on a regular basis.
>
> Andy, who came to school determined to be a pharmacist, who then disappeared during the last month of school, who ultimately received failing grades in every class, and whose parents say only that he has chosen not to return my phone calls.
>
> Rob, who became inconsolable in my office after witnessing the suicide of his best friend, who chose to return home rather than to remain at a school permanently connected to the sense of loss Hannah had described.

I know that I share a bond with the advisors whose conversations have led me to a deeper understanding of the experience of advising first-year students. That bond is through authentic care, a phenomenon described by Noddings (1984) as "the natural sympathy human beings feel for each other and the longing to maintain, recapture, or enhance our most caring moments" (p. 104). I have learned that care drives our advising—a care based on our own experiences, our own lives, and our own needs. I have also learned that our provision of care is part of a continual process of self-awareness, an act of becoming that is ultimately based in acceptance of the self, an act that can lead to deeper meaning:

> Living a life centered around caring for . . . others is living the meaning of my life. And it is only because the others I care for are primary for me that I am able to live the meaning of my life. (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 47)

What does the revealing of the essence of the phenomenon of first-year advising mean to me as an advisor? What is the significance of its discovery to other advisors? What is its pedagogical value? I now write towards that point beyond the essence, that point at which I make meanings of what I have learned.

CHAPTER FIVE:

STEPPING BACK FROM THE WHEEL

Looking Within the Vessel

As the potter steps back from the kiln-ready pot in the middle of the now-idle wheel, considering the pot's likely outcome and re-evaluating the steps taken to that point, I too "step back" from my writings and conversations to ponder the meanings that I have brought forth about the experience of advising first-year college students.

Grasping the depth of what my research reveals has been no easy task. This portion of my writing has been reminiscent of my own encounter with the clay: creating a form, only to eliminate it seconds later; sitting confidently astride the potter's wheel, only to find that the clay has a mind of its own. Considering the stories brought forth by the advisors in my conversation circle was to have been, I thought, a relatively straightforward task. After all, had I not been an advisor for over 20 years? Had I not immersed myself in the writing and re-writing of my conversants' words, digging ever deeper for fundamental meanings? Had I not kept journals of my own experience in order to open the phenomenon for my own viewing?

Gadamer (1960/1975), whose words have often brought insight to the process of writing toward understanding, has been no help in this case. He says, quite bluntly, that "To acquire an awareness of a

situation is . . . always a task of particular difficulty. . . We are always within the situation, and to throw light on it is a task that is never completely completed" (p. 269). Yes, I continue to be in the situation of advising, for my advisee roster has swelled to 75 students, including the 11 new first-year students who were assigned to me last fall. If Gadamer's observation is, in fact, true—that knowing is continually in state of emergence—what, then, have I learned now, at this point in time, even as I continue to advise? What type of meaning-making can I offer to myself—and, by extension, to others?

As a beginning potter must eventually move beyond the comfort level of an established, "safe" technique, I must heighten my awareness of the essence of the advising experience by broadening my range of vision. "The activities of a life are infused by examination, not just affected by it, and their character is different when permeated by the results of concentrated reflection" (Nozick, 1989, p. 14). What different aspects of my experiences in advising, and those of the advisors with whom I have held conversations for the past year, are revealed in such reflection? What might these insights say to others who advise first-year college students?

Centering Through Care

My conversations with the advisors have revealed a fundamental component in the advising of first-year college students:

that the act of advising is centered on the giving of care to students. Richards (1962) explains the importance of centering in clay-building:

> Because the wheel is center-oriented, the ball of clay will take a centered position naturally if we create the necessary support and influence. . . Once it has become centered, it will remain so unless there is a flaw in the clay, or unless it is knocked off center by some outside force. (p. 35)

In the sharing of their stories, the advisors have shown that the placement of care at the center of their advising outreach is a natural occurrence, a "happening" that appeared without beckoning, an intuitive feeling that firmly engaged itself without conscious intervention. Their care-centered selves, even though they may be in various stages of becoming, still offer a nurturing environment to first-year college students, especially during that particular point in time when the students have before them a world unlimited in its potential.

I also have learned that the circumstances of care's presence are as unique as the caregivers themselves. No one "correct" or "appropriate" way exists in the giving of care in the advising of first-year college students. While Ellen revels in care-giving in the role of "school mom," Rachel admits that the only familial connection she could handle, that could offer care, would be that of a "big sister." Instead, her caring shines through in enthusiasm, in friendship, and in curiosity. Andrew's commitment to care through the achievement of transcendent experiences balances well with his philosophy of the "power" that is possible in a one-on-one relationship. Walter offers

care in his focus on "helping students help themselves," a theme that runs deep in Miranda's advising, although her care is a "tough love" form of care, dispensed with a stern attitude.

The advisors also have shown me that their care further manifests itself in hopefulness. "Hope, as an expression of a present alive with possibilities, rallies energies and activates our powers; it is not a passive waiting for something to happen from the outside" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 19). The advisors express such hope for their students, a hope that they will learn, that they will grow, that they will leave the advising relationship stronger, wiser, and more ready to deal with life's issues. In reminiscing about her last meeting with a particular student, Hannah states, "There's a seed planted, I'm hoping. I'm hoping something good will come out of it." Walter is hopeful for Joseph, the young athlete: "I hope he either wakes up and finds what he wants, or he tries to come back [to college], or he finds his real passion. And I don't know what that will be, but maybe someday I'll find out." Both Miranda and Andrew speak of their hope that students under their charge embrace their own responsibilities for self, while Rachel hopes that, by example, she has shown them the joy of being passionate about whatever they choose to do.

The Pedagogy of Care

As I work toward a "sense-making" of my conversations, I also consider van Manen's (1990) imperative of human science research:

specifically, that the pedagogical significance of my inquiry into the experience of advising first-year college students be addressed. He further reminds me that my text should maintain a "pedagogic voice" (p. 138) as I investigate the experience of advising. "Pedagogy," as a noun, is defined as "the art or science of teaching; education; instructional methods" (Costello et al., 1993, p. 995). In my conversations, I have discovered that advisors identify advising as a form of teaching, a connection that has deep pedagogical implications.

Advising, in its attention to each student, presents itself as a mode of pedagogy grounded in "the particular case" (van Manen, 1990, p. 150). As such, pedagogical action in advising does not—and cannot—limit itself to arbitrary application of theory. Instead, advising as a form of pedagogy includes a concept that cannot be taught formally: a sincerity based on attention to the student and a focus on providing care appropriate for that student's situation.

To maintain this pedagogical grounding requires self-reflection by the advisor, who "continuously must redeem, retrieve, regain, recapture in the sense of recalling . . .what authorizes me" (van Manen, 1990, p. 149) to be in an advising relationship. This continual reflection on advising reminds the advisors that care is presented on an individual basis:

> To care is to act not by fixed rule but by affection and regard. It seems likely, then, that the actions of one-caring will be varied rather than rule-bound, that is, her [*sic*] actions, while predictable in a global sense, will be unpredictable in detail.

> Variation is to be expected if the one claiming to care really cares, for her engrossment is in the variable and never fully understood other, in the particular other, in a particular set of circumstances. (Noddings, 1984, p. 24)

Care in advising further presents its pedagogical power with its continual presence in celebration of the uniqueness of first-year college students. Advising as pedagogy thus steps beyond the boundaries of teaching strategy into the everydayness of each original encounter, a correlation found in van Manen's (1991) explanation of the relationship of teachers and children:

> Pedagogy is found not in observational categories, but like love or friendship in the experience of its presence—that is, in concrete, real-life situations. It is here and here and here, where an adult does something right in the personal development of a child. . . In this sense, pedagogy is defined not only as a certain relationship or a way of doing, but also pedagogy lets an encounter, a relationship, a situation, or an activity be pedagogical. (p. 31)

Building from Care's Foundation

Care as pedagogy thus surfaces as a major theme in the experience of advising first-year college students. What other insights have been revealed through my exploration?

The visceral feeling of being called stands as a universal experience. Each advisor has added the function of advising first-year students to an already aggressive schedule of administrative and/or teaching responsibilities. The advisors have characterized their decision to advise first-year students as responding to an inner motivation, a call. We are reminded that "A call is a heightened

response to our human restlessness" (Berman, 1994b, p. 9). Through our conversations, each of the advisors speaks to the feeling of fulfillment engendered in the advising of first-year students, even, in some cases, after the addition of these duties (without any additional compensation) to their roster of responsibilities.

An understanding of the transience of the advising relationship revealed itself as a point of recognition common to all the advisors. They tacitly understand that they are with these students for only a short time—often for only one semester. However, each advisor also knows that a long-term relationship is not a prerequisite for presenting authentic care to students, and they find a certain pleasure in "observing from afar" as their former advisees move on to their major programs. Rachel and Hannah both cite a feeling that the "loss" of students as advisees is the "natural order of things;" Miranda speaks of the "sense of satisfaction" she receives when students are successful beyond her advising. Walter observes, "I feel like I've done what I can, and now they're taking the next step. I'm sort of like the benevolent uncle, being proud of his niece or nephew." Andrew maintains the most philosophical approach to the "moving on" of students: "If it's one of the students that I've had a powerful experience with, that connectedness is not going to end, that thing that we were able to accomplish and experience is going to be there."

Confirming the Essence

For the past several months both Tricia and I have been working at a "fever pitch": I have been finishing the writing on my dissertation, she has been producing pieces of pottery for her first professional gallery exhibit, an event scheduled for the spring. In preparing for the showing of her work, she has expanded greatly her repertoire of clay, glaze, and form, experimenting in clays with names like "Orangestone" and "Loafer's Choice," using her knowledge of the chemical properties of glazes to create new colors and textures, exploring hand-building as a complement to forms thrown on the wheel. I ask her why she is trying these new combinations when her show is looming on the horizon. "Why not play it safe," I ask, "and stick with what you know will work?" Tricia stops kneading the ball of clay on the work table before her, pondering my question for a few seconds before replying, "I'm still fascinated with the unpredictability of each new clay. I find myself thinking that it can become almost anything, and I can't wait to find out what happens."

Tricia's comment mirrors the essence of the experience of advising first-year college students. For Tricia, the excitement of working in clay continues in the potential found in each mound of clay that presents itself to her, for buried within that mound is a cup, or bowl, or platter, or form known only to Tricia. As soon as she presses her hands to the clay, the act of forming begins. The advisors

revel in the same atmosphere of expectation, for new first-year students bring to the advising relationship a formlessness that lasts for only the briefest instant, at the very beginning of their college careers, when the advisors can share the experiences of each student's limitless potential.

Why is the sharing of this unique moment important to these advisors? I now know now that such a being-with moment embodies the act of care, for "'being with' characterizes the process of caring itself: in caring for another person we can be said to be basically with him [*sic*] in his world, in contrast to simply knowing about him from outside" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 32). The advisors, in presenting themselves in a caring relationship with their students, provide comfort, interest, and support at a pivotal time in the lives of individuals on the cusps of their futures. The advisors are with the students in their world, sharing their challenges and their accomplishments, knowing that connections to these students are most often transitory in nature, but embracing the everydayness of the relationship and its intrinsic value.

Finding the Potter in Me

Through our conversations, I have learned much about the experience of advising first-year college students. The advisors have freely shared with me their thoughts about their engagement with students, celebrating their joys, admitting their frustrations. Now, I

step further away from the wheel and look inside myself. How has the search for the essence of the advising experience affected me, as both the researcher and as a participant who continues to live the experience? Berman (1994b) asks that I contemplate my obligation to fully perceive, on a broader scale, what I have learned:

> What is the responsibility of persons in sharing their meanings with others? Are we to be like artists who use their gifts to 'make a statement' to the outside world, or do we try to ensure that others at least partially understand our sense-making as we move through life? (p. 8)

"All understanding is ultimately a self-understanding," observes Gadamer (1960/1975), because "A person who understands . . . projects himself [*sic*] according to his possibilities" (p. 231). For others to understand the meanings that I attempt to share, I must heed Gadamer's admonition: I must fully comprehend the impact on me, and on my advising, of the conversations I have held and the worlds about which I have written as I have searched for the essence of the experience of advising first-year college students.

Serendipity revisited. As I began my sojourn in meaning-making, I felt like the potter who vainly attempted to gain insight from one of his pots: "If you ask the surface where the inside stops and the outside begins, it won't be able to tell you; it thinks it's all one . . . Inside is clearly there, but where does it start?" (Danisch, 2003, p. 110). Having advised for so long, and with so many students, I knew, objectively, why I advised—and yet, on the other hand, I had no

inkling as to truly why I advised. Was it fate, then—the same fate that connected me to Keith, a meeting that began my journey towards discovering the essence of advising first-year college students—that led me to an encounter with Brandon and a deeper understanding of my own essential self within the advising relationship?

"Do you think I can?" Brandon, a first-year student from Washington, D.C., enters my office, wearing an oversized t-shirt and nylon athletic shorts with the waist pulled down below his hips (I always wonder how shorts worn in this manner ever stay in place). After exchanging pleasantries, our discussion begins with a review of his mid-term grades, grades that are less than stellar: three F's and a D. "What's happening here, Brandon?" I ask in my most advisorly tone, equal parts concern and consternation.

"I've talked to all my teachers, and I've found out how I can improve my grades," Brandon replies, an earnestness and maturity in his voice that belies the stereotype presented by his mode of dress. "I've signed up for a tutor for two of my classes, and I have a study schedule set up that lets me get all my work done on time." His eyes meet mine, and the resolve of his voice is reflected in the determination that I see in his eyes. "I know that studying is sometimes hard for me, but . . . " As his voice trails away, I realize that Brandon has stepped beyond my office, beyond our conversation, and into another place.

"But what, Brandon?" I ask, watching as his eyes begin to glisten.

Blinking and coming back to the present, Brandon focuses on our conversation, replying in a voice barely above a whisper, "I don't want to go back there. I can't."

"Where, Brandon? What do you mean?"

"Back there, at home, I don't have a chance," Brandon answers, his sentences broken by deep swallows. "I had two best friends; one died last year in a car wreck. The other may get life in prison because he killed two men when driving drunk, and he already was on probation for drunk driving. In college, I can try to make something of myself." He stops speaking, an earnestness in his eyes revealing the level of perseverance buried within. "I know that I'm not really smart, but I know that if I keep trying, I'll be able to pass my courses." He pauses. "Do you think I can?"

For the first time in recent memory, I am speechless. Usually, I am able to respond quickly and smoothly to a student's entreaty, counting on 20 years' of experience to take me through virtually any situation. Now, this young man is looking to me to confirm that he has the abilities within himself to step beyond a very real destiny and towards one exclusively of his own making.

Returning Brandon's gaze, I smile and reply, "Yes, Brandon. I know you can. It just takes a while to get adjusted to the

expectations of college. Now let's talk about other steps you can take to pull up your grades."

For the next half-hour, as we discuss additional services that he can use and as we identify appropriate classes for next semester, I realize that the knot coiling within my stomach is borne of a feeling of intense care. I care about Brandon; I want him to succeed. I want him to be the person that he knows he can be, and I will do whatever is reasonable to be sure that he is not lost, that he does not go "back there" and become another story on the late-night news.

My transformative encounter. In my engagement with Brandon, the conversations with Hannah, Andrew, Ellen, Miranda, Rachel, and Walter stand out clearly, etched against my perceptions like the branches of a barren tree against the bright blue of a cloudless winter day. Hidden beneath issues of policies, procedures, and requirements lay the one fundamental essence of the advising relationship that remains important to me, that binds me to the other advisors: authentic care. My care for Brandon is visceral, an uncontrollable building up within my being, "an inrush of compassion . . . like a surge of energy, transformative" (Slunt, 1994, p. 60).

Am I transformed by this encounter with Brandon? Yes, if I apply Gadamer's (1927/1962) theory of "transformation into the true . . . It is itself redemption and transformation back into true being" (p. 101). In my administrative duties, I had been slowly, perhaps

consciously, removing myself from this connection with "true being," allowing my advising duties to be pre-empted by administrative pressures, slowly including advising as just another duty on a roster of functions: establish summer school courses, coordinate assessment efforts, advise students, complete faculty contracts. The encounter with Brandon has renewed my commitment to students as individuals and with my own self, a self that cares. I now understand better the definition of authenticity of care offered by Lashley (1994):

> [Authentic care] means releasing self from indifference and distancing, a posture often found to exist in an administered bureaucratized society. It means finding real meaning in relationship with another, caring deeply, and affirming caring as a foundation for responsible existence. (p. 49)

I have found that my exploration into the essence of advising first-year college students has "re-centered" my own self. Now, in my advising, I find it easier to disengage from the pressing administrative duties of the day and to focus on the student. I am less inclined to posit myself as "the final answer," listening more closely as students bring forth their issues, remembering the scope of challenges and decisions facing a first-year college student.

As a result, my renewed sense of balance between advising and administration bears benefits for my students. Richards (1962) writes that when a potter has centered the clay correctly in the middle of the rotating wheel, the potter thus allows the clay "to live into a form which it would itself declare" (p. 12). I am more patient in providing

whatever help I can to assist a student's growth, and I am more compassionate when some students' journeys toward self-discovery are marked by unexpected or hidden obstacles.

Most importantly, I am more comfortable with the self that is presented in my advising of first-year students, a self that embraces care and accepts the need to care as an integral part of its Being. I had struggled with advising for the past several years, wondering if I could be engaged in something "more professionally challenging," pondering additional assignments to reduce my advising load, consciously directing myself away from the role of advisor. In effect, I was abandoning my own self in the face of external indices of success in academic administration, saying that "I can do better than just advising" and forgetting that the reason I chose higher education as a career was that I enjoyed working with college-age individuals.

Now that enjoyment has returned. I freely admit that the inner warmth I feel when advising first-year college students has been re-kindled. During those months when I most deeply questioned my reasons for advising, I found that I had not even bothered to remember the names of my advisees. Now, their names return to me automatically when they appear at my office door. The surge of excitement that I had experienced when showing students various options has percolated back into my being, giving me a sense of fulfillment when a student leaves my office. I have stepped outside

myself to observe the "me" as advisor, and I find that I am more genuine with students, more engaged in conversations with them, and more patient. I have accepted—at 53 years of age—that the person that I am is fed by the care that I give students through advising.

In the following passage of an essay written by Martin Buber (1957), I see within its words an interpretation of the potter as artist and the advisor as potter. More importantly, I see me, as an advisor, in my resurrected commitment to advising:

> True art is a loving art. To him [sic] who pursues such art there appears, when he experiences an existent thing, the secret shape of that thing which appeared to none before him. This he does not see only with his eyes, rather he feels its outlines with his limbs; a heart beats against his heart. Thus he learns the glory of things so that he expresses them and praises them and reveals their shape to others. (Buber, 1957, p. 29)

Through my search for the essence of advising first-year college students, I have re-discovered the "glory" of that everyday act of connection between advisor and student, feeling within the depth of my own being that advising is an integral part of who I am, and accepting fully that "secret shape" which I had temporarily hidden from my own view.

Sharing the Lessons of the Clay

Process or product: Which of the two ultimately is most important in clay-building or in advising first-year college students? The tension between these concepts is apparent to a novice potter

who, experiencing a beginning lesson on the pottery wheel, attempts to shift to a way of thinking less oriented to a final outcome:

> "It's the process, not the product." . . . Process, not product. Become one with the clay. No quick or jerky movements. Relax your hands before releasing the clay. The wheels hum in unison while the clay moves silently in our hands. I haven't been this frustrated trying to learn something for a long time. "It takes practice, like anything else," my teacher says. I am listening intently to the clay and hoping the clay is listening to me. And I almost have it. (McGovern, 2002, p. 112)

I, too, have been listening intently to the clay, the clay that speaks to me from the wheel, the clay that makes its voice known through the conversations with my advisors. What *is* more important: process or product? Perhaps in the advising of first-year students, the process—one that is borne on the support and encouragement of care—reveals the significance of the experience of advising first-year college students. Do I "almost have it?" What have I uncovered that can be shared with others who advise? I turn to an exploration of the insights into advising that have been disclosed through my writing and re-writing, illuminating their value to the profession of academic advising.

Care's Public Face

Academic advising, as a formalized administrative/student services function that encompasses working with first-year college students, is a relative newcomer to higher education; in fact, it was not until "the late 1970s [that] academic advising had begun to resemble an organized profession" (Frost, 2000, p. 11). As a result,

the past 25 years have witnessed a significant increase in the interest in academic advising and the role that it plays in the lives of college students.

In this growth of the profession, has the issue of authentic care as an integral component of the advising experience surfaced? Are the encounters of the advisors who have shared their stories with me part of a larger circle of advising experiences? To find answers to my questions, I turn to professional literature that addresses academic advising.

Investigating core values. A key player in the ascendancy of academic advising to the status of professional recognition has been the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), formed in 1979 "to promote quality academic advising on college and university campuses" (National Academic Advising Association, 2000, p. 409). In the preface to its statement of professional core values, NACADA asserts, "Few events in students' postsecondary experiences have as much potential for influencing their development as does academic advising" (National Academic Advising Association, 2000, p. 409). Because the NACADA statement of core values is the most up-to-date listing of professional expectations for academic advising that I have identified, I have searched these standards, looking for a complement to, or a verification of, what I had learned in my conversations, that authentic care is central, not only to advising first-year college

students, but to academic advising in general. I have located a single allusion to care, listed with Core Value #1:

> Advisors introduce students in a *nurturing* [italics added] way to the world they are entering—teaching them to value the learning process, put the college experience into perspective, become more responsible, set priorities and evaluate sequence of events, and be honest with themselves. (National Academic Advising Association, 2000, p. 411)

The remainder of the core values I have read, with great interest, to understand what professionals in the field identify as the primary values for advising, and I offer a synopsis here. All quotations are gleaned from the NACADA Statement of Core Values (National Academic Advising Association, 2000, pp. 411-414):

> Value #1: Advisors are responsible to the students and individuals they serve. The cooperative efforts of all who advise help to deliver quality programs and services to students. These include, but are not limited to, giving accurate and timely information, maintaining regular office hours, and keeping appointments.
>
> Value #2: Advisors are responsible for involving others, when appropriate, in the advising process. . . Advisors are facilitators and mediators. Responsible academic advisors recognize their limitations and use their specialized knowledge effectively. To make connections between academic advising and other aspects of students' lives, advisors seek out resources provided by others.
>
> Value #3: Advisors are responsible to the college or university in which they work. . . Advisors abide by the specific policies, procedures, and values of the department and institution for which they work.
>
> Value #4: Advisors are responsible to higher education generally. Academic advisors honor (and are protected by) the concept of academic freedom as practiced on our campuses. In this spirit, advisors hold a variety of points of view. Academic advisors are free to base their work with students on the most

> appropriate and optimum theories of college student development and models of delivery for academic advising programs and services.
>
> Value #5: Advisors are responsible to the community (including the local community, state, and region in which the institution is located). Academic advisors interpret the institution's mission, standards, goals, and values to its community, including public and private schools from which the college or university draws its student body.
>
> Value #6: Advisors are responsible to their professional role as advisors and to themselves personally. To keep advising skills honed and interest high, advisors are encouraged to seek opportunities for professional development through classes, workshops, conferences, reading, consultation with others, and interaction in formal groups with other advisors. . . Advisors develop skills for taking care of themselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Obvious by its absence. After completing my review of the profession's standards, I pause to reflect on what I have learned in my conversations with my fellow advisors. Are they professionals? Without a doubt. In their actions, do they represent themselves as advisors according to the set of core values I had just reviewed? Most assuredly. Why, then, do the advisors identify care as a centerpiece in the experience of advising, while the concept receives only an indirect reference in professional standards? Why does the profession's leading association state, in the introduction to its core values, that advisors should provide to students, as the primary thrust of advising, "dependable, accurate, respectful, honest, friendly, and professional service" (National Academic Advising Association, 2000, p. 411)? These expectations could easily be identical to those

in the job requirements for a bank teller, an automobile parts manager, or a retail sales associate. Where is the expectation stated that advisors show authentic care for students as individuals at a pivotal point in their personal development?

Does interest equal care? After having read the professional core values, I feel as though I had just tried to finish a novel from which a chapter had been removed. Yes, the standards infer the importance of advisors having an interest in students. Yes, the standards list important tasks, characteristics, and expectations. Yes, the standards emphasize the importance of understanding various student development theories and knowing institutional policies. But what about actually caring about students? My experience at the Finzel Swamp, when I tried to draw from Barbara Hurd's source of inspiration in order to give the writing of my dissertation a much-needed "boost of adrenalin," had convinced me that "interest" and "ability" are two fundamentally different constructs. In discussing the ability to give care, Mayerhoff (1971) reminds us, "There is the difference between knowing that something is so and knowing how to do something. A man [*sic*] may know much about the theory of teaching without being able to teach" (p. 10). The same admonition holds for first-year advising: What happens if an advisor is operationally qualified and interested, but does not have the ability really to care about the students being advised? Yes, students

can receive "dependable, accurate, respectful, honest, friendly, and professional service" from their advisor, but if such service is not built on an authentic caring for the students as individuals, have the students truly been helped?

With these questions in mind, I turn to my task at hand: the sense-making of what I have learned about the experience of advising, and how my exploration offers insight for advisors in understanding more deeply what they can and should bring to the advising relationship.

The Wheel's Broader Universe

"In the Hindu myths, the potter's wheel originated as Vishnu's discus. As such, it replays the creation of the universe every time a lump of shapeless clay is spun on it" (Danisch, 2003, p. 108). The creation of this "universe"—in working with the clay that is a first-year college student—does not happen only with the advisors with whom I have held conversations, nor does it happen only with me; instead, the experience occurs every time advisors invite first-year students into their offices. How can the meanings that I have found in my search for the essence of advising first-year college students contribute to that which advisors should understand about themselves and about the unique human engagement of advising?

The importance of "pedagogical thoughtfulness." Having previously written my way toward an understanding that advising is a

form of pedagogy, I turn to the words of van Manen (1991), who reminds us, "The preparation of educators obviously includes much more than the teaching of knowledge and skills, more even than a professional ethical code or moral craft" (p. 9). Instead, specific essential qualities exist that are imperative to good pedagogy, qualities that he cites in working with children. These attributes are applicable to first-year college students, for, as Ellen has observed, "They say they're adults, but they're really not. They're just kids." Beyond the display of a skill, beyond the operating knowledge of a particular theory, and beyond provision of a service, then, are those personal characteristics of each advisor that are crucial to the development of a "pedagogical thoughtfulness" (p. 9) about advising first-year college students:

> A sense of vocation, love of and caring for children, a deep sense of responsibility, moral intuitiveness, self-critical openness, thoughtful maturity, tactful sensitivity toward the child's subjectivity, an interpretive intelligence, a pedagogical understanding of the child's needs, improvisational resoluteness in dealing with young people, a passion for knowing and learning the mysteries of the world, the moral fibre to stand up for something, a certain understanding of the world, active hope in the face of prevailing crises, and, not the least, humor and vitality. (p. 8)

Although van Manen speaks to engagement with children, persons could be substituted for children in the observation of thoughtfulness, for these pedagogical qualities are appropriate for any age level.

Thus, any roster of expectations, standards, or core values for academic advising should include in its preface or opening statement

an endorsement of the concept of authentic care, as illustrated by van Manen's roster of attributes, as the foundation for advising. Advisors must be devoted to the primacy of care in their relationships with students, because "Devotion is essential to caring . . . When devotion breaks down, caring breaks down" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 5).

"Out there" and "in here." In considering what my conversations and writing have revealed as important for the continuing development of the advising profession, I re-confirm adamantly that the concept of care is central to the advising experience. In reading (and citing, elsewhere in this dissertation) various goals and objectives of advising, I am concerned that the concept of person-to-person care is subsumed by more "administrative" goals of assisting, facilitating, coordinating, referring, and identifying. Such a drift toward administrative constraints occurs, according to Buber (1923/1970), because the human exists within the two worlds of "out there" and "in here":

> Institutions are what is "out there" where for all kinds of purposes one spends time, where one works, negotiates, influences, undertakes, competes, organizes, administers, officiates, preaches; the halfway orderly and on the whole coherent structure where, with the manifold participation of human heads and human limbs, the round of affairs runs its course.
>
> Feelings are what is "in here" where one lives and recovers from the institutions. Here the spectrum of the emotions swings before the interested eye. (p. 93)

Advising's procedural constructs clearly emphasize the "out there" aspect of working with students: the institutional expectations, the academic requirements, the insistencies on developing good goal-setting techniques and effective study habits. Pushed to a "back burner" has been the "in here" portion: the primacy of the act of care that each advisor brings to the one-on-one relationship with students, the feelings of engagement, the "spectrum of emotions." The focus of the advisor's efforts in care should be shown in what van Manen (1991) identifies as "tact": "The expression of a thoughtfulness that involves the total being of the person, an active sensitivity toward the subjectivity of the other, for what is unique and special about the other person" (p. 146). The subjectiveness of tact must envelop the entirety of the advising relationship, providing a foundation for procedure used in the context of the uniqueness of the student.

Preparing to care. As with any professional organization, theories of training academic advising professionals have surfaced as the profession matures. Citing a recent survey on practices in academic advising, King (2000) observes, "The most common focus for training . . . continues to be on information and facts, with some attention paid to concepts such as definition and importance of advising" (p. 291). Higginson (2000) recommends that training program content include opportunities to understand, in more depth, the contexts of a college student's life and to explore advisors'

attitudes about students. However, current literature on advisor training does not address the importance of caring for students, a premise emphasized repeatedly in the stories shared by the six advisors with whom I participated in conversations.

As a result of the absence of care as a "training topic," advisors should include discussions on care as a primary presence within the advising relationship, understanding its inherent intangibility when compared with policy and procedure. Of particular importance is the emphasis that without the advisors' ability to present themselves in a caring relationship to first-year students, the impact of advising can be emasculated.

Understanding the self. Beyond standards, beyond policy, and beyond theory, advisors also must understand the self that they bring to the advising relationship. Each self is built upon a series of unique life experiences. As a result, the self presented in advising has a set of outlooks, values, and perceptions that predispose each advisor to particular opinions, actions, and responses.

Advisors must also be aware their self may still be in the act of becoming. Their act of caring may be a means by which they search for self-actualization, for "Being called to care means creating ways to cope and deal with the satisfactions and dissatisfactions persons uncover as they plow through the fields of selfhood" (Berman, 1994c, p. 164). Therefore, providing authentic care cannot fully be altruistic;

in fact, the act of care often is reciprocal in nature. That act of reciprocity provides a benefit to the advisor, as Walter has observed, because engagement with students offers opportunities to learn more about the advisor's self.

Understanding not understanding. Because each self is unique, the individual combinations of personal value systems and perceptions brought to an advising relationship vary with each advisor. Of vital importance to advisors is their comprehension of the fact that they simply may not understand a student whose accumulated experiences are different from their own. As Ellen, Rachel, Hannah, Walter, Andrew, and Miranda have expressed through their stories—and as I have so often experienced in my own advising—caring for students who present themselves in difference many times causes an advisor the greatest challenges and the strongest feelings of inadequacy.

Mayerhoff (1971) paints the act of caring as deceptively simple: "To care for another person, I must be able to understand him [*sic*] and his world as if I were inside it. I must be able to see, as it were, with his eyes what his world is like to him and how he sees himself" (p. 30). Such an admonition is "easier said than done," for often attempts to do so are hampered by advisors' worries that they will be perceived as patronizing, arrogant, or disinterested.

Caring in the face of difference, however, becomes much more complicated when advisors do not face the "unmentionable" facets of their innermost being, those factors that exist in every human in one form or another. What happens to care if racist thoughts factor into an opinion about a student? Is care driven away by a stereotype so strongly planted within an advisor's psyche that authenticity in the relationship is sacrificed? If an advisor harbors preconceptions about a certain student's ability—preconceptions based on external appearance or surname or home address—can care ever present itself fully to that student?

Advisors must accept that not understanding may be an inevitable consequence of working with students whose gender, race, cultural background, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or socio-economic status is drastically different from their own. However, if an advisor truly wishes to step beyond accumulated perceptions based on misperceptions and generalizations, the focus must be placed on strategies that are universal in the presentation of care. In order to build an honest relationship with these students, advisors should make as their priorities efforts "to build a trusting relationship with the students, to try to determine their needs, and to provide the encouragement and support of all campus resources to involve them in campus life and to help them to attain their goals" (Strommer, 1995, p. 32).

When the clay overwhelms the potter. I recall distinctly my feelings of hesitancy as I straddled the pottery wheel for the first time, staring at the mound of clay before me. Tricia had given me more than enough instruction and advice on centering the clay, on maintaining the speed of the wheel, on using the pressure of my fingers to manipulate a form out of the revolving clay. Still, I was uneasy: I knew enough to get started, but what about the unexpected? What if the clay became too dry? What if I made the walls or base too thin? What if I were unable to pull the pot from the wheel when I was through? My mind raced with a whole series of "what if's" as I set the wheel to motion.

Advisors share these same feelings of unpreparedness when they realize that an advising session is moving away from a discussion of course selection and program planning into the unveiling of students' personal problems or crises. The advisors have spoken of their fear of entering "uncharted waters" when students introduce into the conversation issues of such consequence as anorexia, drug addiction, depression, and parental abuse. Advisors may understand cognitively that the student is groping for help or searching for some small hint of assurance or comfort. They may also comprehend objectively that their position as "the advisor" can represent a safe haven in the personal storm that the student is enduring. Still, the advisors have spoken passionately about their fear of not being able to

handle the depth and intensity of issues presented by students, of not being trained to be counselors.

> Understanding personal limitations is the first step that advisors must take in dealing with the scope of student issues. Inevitably, students will divulge deeply personal problems if the advisors have offered a relationship predicted on an atmosphere of authentic care. However, advisors must understand that although they may not have the training that counselors have in order to deal with such issues, not being able to help the student is not an indication of failure on the part of the advisor. Knowing the warning signs—those presented by the student as well as those that emerge within the advisor—and knowing when to make appropriate referrals to professional counselors are still acts of caring by the advisor.

Caring in excess. Advising of first-year students is, by design, a transient relationship. The advisor is present at a particular point in that student's life, providing information, support, and encouragement in the transition from neophyte to experienced college student. Yet, just as a potter must know when to cease manipulation of the clay, an advisor must understand that there exists a fine line between authentic care and a care that supersedes a level appropriate for a short-term relationship.

Care is often predicated on the advisors' own positive memories: "We have memories of caring, of tenderness, and these lead us to a vision of what is good—a state that is good-in-itself and a commitment to sustain and enhance that good" (Noddings, 1984, p. 99). As a result, advisors may wish to perpetuate those memories in their own advising, striving to transmit their own good feelings to students as the individuals receiving care. However, advising first-year students

automatically is constructed within a specific time frame: the first year of a student's college experience. Advisors must understand that care offered to students should be presented within an understanding of students' experiences as they adjust to a new environment and a new set of expectations. Advisors that become too deeply involved in students' lives run the risk of providing a care that becomes counter-productive. Students need care that helps them to grow as individuals; part of that growth is making mistakes and not being protected from such missteps. Advisors whose care smothers the students, whose care creates in students a dependency on the advisor, actually forge an additional obstacle for the students to overcome. Ellen best explains the type of care appropriate for first-year students in her understanding that her role as an advisor is one of many interactions a student will have while in college: Her caring "doesn't tie them to me; it gives them wings."

Strengthening the Hands that Press the Clay

Having explored the meanings offered to individual advisors as the result of my study, I now turn to broader concerns: What issues of significance have I found in my journey that might contribute to the larger world of advising? In discussing the contents of the various clays used in pottery, Peterson (2000) observes, "Most clays are not used alone, but are combined with non-clay elements into a 'clay body' composition" (P. 137). As silica and feldspar contribute to the

clay's structure, I offer my contributions to the broader arena of advising.

Celebrating care in advising. Academic advising as a subject of investigation has addressed multiple administrative, professional, and theoretical issues (e.g., Bartlett, 2002; Brown & Rivas, 1995; Creamer, 2000; Ender & Wilkie, 2000; Frost, 1991; Habley, 1995; Strommer, 1995). Upcraft and Gardner (1989) offer an example of such research, reporting their findings that advisors can help first-year students significantly in taking their first steps toward achievement of specific goals focused on personal identity, intellectual achievement, and career preparation. Yet Kramer and Spencer (1989) voice the concern that advising first-year students entails more than offering an expertise in procedure: "The freshman year is the best chance we have to touch the hearts and minds of our students. For many students, it is the only chance" (p. 103).

My research opens up the meanings behind the cautionary stance of Kramer and Spencer, revealing the importance of an interaction that goes beyond issues of college acclimation and career choice. Through my uncovering of care as a fundamental tenet of first-year advising, I emphasize the importance of advisors making the commitment to "touch the hearts and the minds" of students. In exploring the depth of the experience behind the everydayness of the advising encounter, I have illuminated the richness of the human-

ness of advising, an aspect of advising that has heretofore not been the subject of any in-depth research.

Broadening advising's scope of study. In my opening of the notion of care as a transcending attribute in the advising of first-year college students, I also have discovered that care can be frustrated by issues of difference— gender, race, cultural background, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or socio-economic status. The most impassioned statements offered by the six advisors with whom I have conversed center on their frustration that their efforts to offer authentic care are often hampered by internal dialogues that are the result of their perceived inability to understand students with backgrounds different from their own.

The issue of difference and its effect on the advising relationship hold a particular interest for me as an area of further research. I know from my own experience how draining the experience of advising can be when a perceived chasm exists between the advisor and the student. I share the frustrations of the advisors, a feeling of wanting to provide care but not knowing exactly how to do so. I also understand fully the feelings of guilt if I experience "inappropriate" feelings in response to a student, responses based on my own accumulated experiences in difference. In light of demographic projections that emphasize the significant increase in the diversity of

students attending college (as cited elsewhere in this dissertation), such research carries a particular timeliness.

Contributing to the body of literature on care. Finally, my research has offered an additional confirmation of care as an integral component, not only of the act of advising first-year students, but of any meaningful person-to-person relationship. I have confirmed that within advising there exists the "rhythm of caring" (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 32), a universal cadence driven by the reciprocal nature of care:

> I experience the other as an extension of myself and also as independent and with the need to grow; I experience the other's development as bound up with my own sense of well-being; and I feel needed by it for that growing. I respond affirmatively and with devotion to the other's need, guided by the direction of its growth. (Mayerhoff, 1971, p. 6)

My conversations with advisors and my search for the meanings found in their experiences reaffirm the contributions made by *Cura* to the human spirit and soul. O'Donohue (1997) reminds us of our connection to *Cura*, that "Fashioned from the earth, we are souls in clay form. We need to remain in rhythm with our inner clay voice and longing" (p. 2). The advisors in my study have shown eloquently that they have heard their inner clay voices, understanding that even as they are the potters, they are themselves clay in a constant state of forming.

The Circular Path to Understanding

Gadamer (1960/1975) explains that understanding ultimately is a circular relationship, for "The anticipation of meaning in which

the whole is envisaged becomes explicit understanding in that the parts, that are determined by the whole, themselves also determine this whole" (p. 259). Like the circle that is the potter's wheel, revolving the clay as the potter presses hands to the clay, impressing upon it a form, my writing has revolved back upon itself, back to the whole of the experience of advising first-year college students after having spun through its parts.

At the beginning of my writing, van Manen (1990) cautioned me that I was setting myself to a difficult task in my effort to unveil the essence of the experience of advising first-year college students:

> To *do* hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal. (p. 18)

To fully describe the essence of the advising of first-year college students is, in fact, the impossible task that van Manen describes. How can I effectively share with the reader the slightest nuance in Andrew's smile as he remembers a particularly powerful engagement with a student? How can I transmit the enthusiasm shown by Rachel when she jumps from her chair during one of our conversations, gesticulating madly in the air, trying to explain what she means by "feeling jazzed"? I cannot. These are moments of intense personal engagement that, when re-considered, are lost to the ineffability of words.

However, it is within the capability of our language that I am able to emphasize that the experience of advising first-year students is an everyday experience, but one that has hidden within it deep meanings that illuminate the way we, as advisors, experience the world, uncovering an additional path by which we may "know the world in which we live as human beings" (van Manen, 1990, p. 5). In my phenomenological journey through this everydayness, I have revealed the depth of caring present in advising first-year college students. Such caring illuminates the importance, the meaning, the significance in something as simple as a shared moment between advisor and student:

> Our common life may gratify
> More feelings than the rarest art,
> For nothing can aspire so high
> As beatings of the human heart.
> (Channing, 1971, p. 32)

Appendix A

AN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

In a series of conversations on

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ADVISING FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

Pressing Hands to Clay: The Phenomenological Experience of the Advisor as Potter

THE STUDY: In the continually-expanding field of higher education research, academic advising has been the subject of many essays. Topics have been as diverse as multicultural advising, advising as a retention tool, and developmental advising.

However, no research studies yet found have investigated the actual lived experience of the advisor. What is the experience of the advisor in working with traditional-aged first-year students? This is the subject of my dissertation I am conducting for my doctoral degree at the University of Maryland.

THE METHODOLOGY: I am employing a form of qualitative research, hermeneutic phenomenology, which, according to van Manen (1990), "questions the way we experience the world," providing opportunities to "know the world in which we live as human beings" (p. 5). In other words, "phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of meaning of our everyday experiences" (p. 9).

THE CONVERSATIONS: I am inviting six (6) advisors of first-year students to engage in a series of three 60-90 minute conversations over a three-month period. Since phenomenology searches for the essence of the experience, our conversations will focus on your description of the experience, avoiding causal explanations or interpretations. In effect, I will be asking you to describe the experience of advising "from the inside." My research will be successful if someone who knows nothing about advising reads my narrative and understands the joy, the frustration, the anger, the empathy attached to working with first-year college students.

TIME COMMITMENTS: Conversations will be held over a period of approximately three months, with scheduling based exclusively on your schedule. I will ask you to read a transcript of a previous meeting in order to dig deeper into your thoughts; in addition, we will convene for one group meeting. You will also be asked to share a written reflection, exploring the themes we have uncovered in our conversations.

Thank you for considering my request. If you would find participation in the project interesting, you may let me know by phone or via email.

Jim Limbaugh Ext. 4489, jlimbaugh@frostburg.edu

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Appendix B

Consent Form

Identification of Project/Title	Pressing Hands to Clay: The Phenomenological Experience of Advisor as Potter
Statement of Age of Subject	I state that I am over 18 years of age, in good physical health, and wish to participate in a program of research being conducted by James Limbaugh in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park.
Purpose	I understand that the purpose of this research is to inform educational practice through the study of the lived experience of advising first-year college students.
Procedures	As a participant, I understand that I will be involved in two conversations, each to be approximately 60-90 minutes in length. I also understand that I will participate in a group conversation and will write a short essay. The conversations and the essay will focus on my experiences as an advisor to first-year college students.
Confidentiality	I understand that I can remain anonymous or that I may give specific written permission to use my first name. I understand that I have the right to request that specific written information or conversation may not be used in the study. I understand that I will be told of any tape recorders that may be present and functioning during conversations, and that I may ask that said recorder be turned off at any time.
Risks	I understand that a result of examining my experiences as an advisor to first-year college students may cause me to contemplate my life choice in a different way, which may promote anxiety or concern. I understand that there are normally no long-term effects as a result of the contemplative experience involved in this research.
Benefits, Freedom to Withdraw	I understand that this study is not designed to help me personally, but that the investigator hopes to learn more about the specific experiences of individuals who serve as advisors to first-year college students. I understand that I am free to ask questions or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
Name, Address, Phone of Graduate Researcher	James M. Limbaugh 18 Greenbriar Court Frostburg, MD 21532 301/687-3130 (work) 301/689-9448 (home) jlimbaugh@frostburg.edu
Name, Address, Phone of Faculty Advisor	Dr. Francine Hultgren Department of Education Policy and Leadership University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742 301/405-4562 fh14umail.umd.edu

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

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