I AM YOUR SON: THERAPEUTIC SONGWRITING
WITH A MAN LIVING WITH COMPLEX TRAUMA

by

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THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department
of
Psychology

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Simon Fraser University
July 2004

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Abstract

This thesis is the result of therapeutic songwriting sessions with a man living with multiple clinical factors. It explores the question: “Could engagement in therapeutic songwriting assist in the discovery and rediscovery of strengths and other resources that could provide clinical benefit and be applied to aspects of daily living to someone in lifelong recovery from complex trauma?” The thesis utilises the research framework of Bentz & Shapiro’s (1998) “Mindful Inquiry,” an approach that integrates the knowledge traditions of phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical social science and Buddhism. It explores the role played by Kenny’s (1989) “Field of Play,” a theoretical view of the music therapy experience. Together the researcher and participant wrote and recorded songs and conducted in depth interviews with follow-up questions. The paper uses song lyrics, interview quotations, the therapist’s personal reflections, field notes and comments from others in the participant’s life. Ultimately, it describes one person’s experience in his efforts to provide safe space for another to enter a field of creativity, experimentation and communication, where they would be free to explore both individuality and the desire for connection with others.
Dedication

This paper necessarily incorporates aspects of the author’s life that unexpectedly arose to prominence during the processing of data, and whose inclusion became essential through their relevance to the questions at hand. He trusts that the particularity of individual experience examined here does not divert attention from the universal nature of the journey we all are undertaking, each at our own pace. He dedicates this work to everyone.
Acknowledgements

With most sincere gratitude, I give thanks to:

Stewart Wilson, for courageously engaging in this exploration,

Carolyn Kenny, for her wisdom and unwavering encouragement,

my birth family for their support and love,

my extended family of loved ones and companions for theirs,

and, at the core of it all, to Leah Decter for hers.
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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AIDS - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
C/PTSD - Complex PTSD
CT - Complex Trauma
HIV - Human Immunovirus
IV - Intravenous (drug use)
PTSD - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
Chapter One – I Could Be Your Son

Introduction – Stewart at the beginning

*I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE A DAY WHERE I FELT LIKE I DO TODAY, WHERE I ACTUALLY FEEL IN CHARGE OF MYSELF AND BE HAPPY TO LOOK AT MYSELF EVERY MORNING AND BE PROUD. IT'S A GOOD FEELING.*

Stewart and I were in the music room of the Centre where I was the staff music therapist. We were engaged in an interview, from which the above quote comes, that would add to the data of my study into therapeutic songwriting. Over a period of several months I would ask many follow-up questions to illuminate this original interview, he and I would write songs together and I would eventually write up my findings. Through that time he and I would continue to engage in music activities: writing other songs, Stewart assisting me in recording his and other participants' material, taking part in Centre jam sessions and performing together in public.

At that moment, I was excited by the quality of our songs and the contribution they were making to the therapeutic progression of our sessions. I had written songs professionally for many years. When I became a music
therapist I found that songwriting, when used as a music therapy intervention, proved very useful in assisting clients to transform prose and poetry into songs. The songs could then be played, sung, performed and also used as a point of departure into therapeutic personal exploration. During this study I also found our interviews fascinating, illuminating and rapport-building. The follow-up questions, too, produced memorable moments that enriched both the process and the final results.

During the actual writing of this paper, however, I found myself uncharacteristically hesitant to begin. Once I had begun, proceeding was difficult, and I resisted forging ahead as I would normally do until finally an accumulation of events brought to the surface some elements that called enough attention to themselves that they require description here.

On the morning that I began to write the first draft to this section of this paper I was, as usual, contemplating the day’s writing ahead, gradually organising my thoughts and, though I enjoy writing, looking for ways by which to put it off for a few more minutes. I had been writing steadily, one day a week, for about two months. In the two months prior to that time, I wrote sporadically, seldom once a week and, in the two months before that time, I could not write at all.

I found it impossible to maintain the writing schedule I had set for myself. I had also gradually acknowledged to myself that the work described in this thesis had evoked emotions for me that were unexpected, and the emotions themselves had ‘triggered’ cognitive responses over which I had almost no
control. Persistent negative thoughts and a new lack of confidence bothered me. I was vaguely aware of uncomfortable feelings and was increasingly experiencing intrusive memories of snapshot moments from the past. My writing schedule had thus begun with me in a self-diagnosed moderately depressed state.

I felt that the impediment to beginning this writing had something to do with the work I was engaged in, that is, music therapy with individuals living with multiple traumas, the most common of which was childhood sexual abuse. The more I focused on the work, the less energy I found I had for the task. The more I pressed on with trying to write about what I witnessed, the more I avoided committing it to paper.

On the morning that I describe above I was taking care of some errands before writing. During one of those tasks I had difficulty getting through by telephone to a certain number. Instead of successful completion, my calls were reaching either fax machines or wrong numbers. Finally, I tried one last time. A recorded male voice announced “Hi. This is... please leave a message and I’ll get back to you as soon as possible.” The name he used was identical to that of an older boy from my childhood who had extensively abused and molested various neighbourhood children at that time, including myself. Soon after that period, when I had been seven and eight years old, my family moved to a distant part of the city and I did not hear about this boy again until I was twenty years old. Then I saw his photograph in a newspaper. He had been found guilty of abusing children and sentenced to a prison term. At the time I did not connect him to improper behaviour with me though I recall looking at his photograph in the
newspaper for a long time. I remember feeling that this concerned me in a very distant way, though it did not trigger any specific memories.

The telephone voice and my childhood memory were not the same person but it did not seem to matter. What seemed important was my response to it, what it meant to me. Now, in the present, I chose to conclude that his ‘reappearance’ in my life was as good a sign as any to face conflicting feelings that had long bothered me, integrate them properly into the work at hand and get on with completing it. It felt like time to get to work and the writing quickly became easier.

It is important to stress how I feel I chose the above conclusion. I had the odd yet empowering sensation that I was strong and stable enough to choose how I interpreted a particular event. It was not lost on me that I could recall innumerable times earlier in my life when how I interpreted an event seemed beyond my control and completely within the control of others, or of fate.

I had long known that many clients’ lives shared similarities with my own. I felt affinity if they described abuse, confusion, isolation, attraction to drugs, etc. I had experienced many of these factors earlier in my life, as have many or most of us. I felt fortunate now to be in the privileged position of a health care professional, in a stable relationship, with good health and a promising future. I saw much benefit in having had some of the above factors ‘touch’ my own life; I felt that it enabled me to better identify with and understand the conditions I witnessed daily.
All of this came into play in my work with Stewart. We met at a time when he was just beginning to exercise the ability to make choices, especially choosing to respond based on how interpretation of events could benefit his increasing health and his struggle toward ‘wholeness’ which we look at later. ‘Uncovering’ my own earlier experiences during this difficult writing period clarified for me the value of empathic response in clinical settings, something that had felt natural to me. Subsequent to that trying period, I was relieved to find that my approach to and enthusiasm for clinical work had not changed.

**Why This Study Was Undertaken**

I chose to explore the potential of therapeutic songwriting because I believed it possible to use it to therapeutic benefit. I felt so because I had already witnessed such benefits in clinical settings and had experienced it myself while writing songs as a professional musician. I knew early in my career that I enjoyed periodically examining my own songs, finding it useful to my emotional and psychological development in ways that a journal could not. Periodically I questioned: Was there even more to learn about what they meant to me, said about me, and said to me? What would I like others to know? Among those who knew me, who would be surprised by what I had just revealed in my song? The benefits were tangible: reflection and review, organisation of thoughts, finding what was ‘hidden,’ noting what was ‘revealed,’ seeing what found its way to the surface of my consciousness, what surprised me, what was obvious, etc. Later, trained as a therapist, I wondered: Could this be a therapeutic tool for others?
I was sure that it could be. As a music therapist I typically witnessed insights generated by non-verbal activities, insights that had not come from the counselling world of verbal discourse. I believed I would like to facilitate a deeper emotional investigation through songwriting, with a selected participant who had survived multiple traumas, hoping it could provide benefits for him that verbal interaction alone had not.

Of course I was not alone in my musical experiences, though as a professional musician I allocated considerably more time to them than others do. Virtually everyone knows the feeling of 'getting chills' or being transported when listening to particular pieces of music with which they have formed a bond. For me, the process of bonding with a piece had predictable stages: strong attraction on first listening, then closer connection after repeated listenings until it eventually felt like it was part of me. This had to be true for others.

In the writing of a song, a writer sees the combined effect of words and music. Once joined, the two elements together produce a 'gestalt,' or a sum much greater than the constituent parts. What were only words without music were now something new, a song. Why did songs have such emotional resonance? What had it meant to me when I now had a song where before I had thoughts, feelings, memories, desires, etc.? How was it that a particular song could seem to sum up an entire experience and evoke such strong feelings, including even body sensations? What did it mean to me, and what could it mean for co-writers?

I chose Stewart as a case study participant out of an original pilot study with eleven subjects. This pilot study, described briefly later in this paper,
focused on therapeutic songwriting with illicit drug users living with HIV/AIDS. Once Stewart agreed to participate I soon became aware of the many elements beyond HIV and drug addiction that had informed his life to date. My investigation expanded into exploring this multitude of life factors, eventually leading me to theorise that what I defined as 'trauma' could, in his case, actually be termed ‘complex trauma’ (Herman, 1997) or Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (C/PTSD). Complex trauma made greater sense to me as an overarching definition, and eventually became the lens through which I viewed my experiences with Stewart and therapeutic songwriting.

Questions

This paper has its roots, as mentioned above, in a pilot study into therapeutic songwriting conducted with eleven individuals. That original study, also a qualitative one, did not focus on complex trauma. Rather, it looked at the trends in songwriting demonstrated by individuals living with HIV/AIDS who had experiences with illicit drug use. Over the course of that project (almost two years) general questions emerged. Some of these eventually became questions that helped guide my work with Stewart. They were:

- If a person engaged in therapeutic songwriting with an experienced songwriter who is also a trained therapist, could they together find benefits and enhancements beyond the immediate pleasurable activity of completing a task, making music, and creating works with another person?
- Could those new experiences provide a blueprint for further new experiences that could be transferrable to daily living?
- If this were successful, could we theorise that the participant had discovered capabilities and faculties of which they had not consciously been aware?
Could we also theorise that the participant had developed new capabilities and faculties previously unknown to them?

**Where This Will Take Us**

Put very simply, this work will take the reader through a therapeutic songwriting process that engendered verbal expression with greater levels of depth than the participant was accustomed to. These discussions in turn led to future musical explorations after which followed more in depth verbal discourse, and so on. Discussions and musical expression both achieved greater depth as a result and Stewart was able, during and after the process, to access his emotional life from new and more perspectives than were previously available to him.

This paper will take the reader through work that describes some of the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and its updated companion Complex PTSD (C/PTSD) or ‘complex trauma.’ This is terrain mapped by theorists in both psychotherapy and music therapy. The journey through this terrain touches upon and enters the “field of play” (Kenny, 1987), a theoretical basis for music therapy practice. It utilises the social research framework of “Mindful Inquiry” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998), a model rooted in critical social theory and Buddhism. The reader will join Stewart and me as we developed a therapeutic relationship during music therapy sessions where we developed topics for songwriting, wrote songs and explored their various inter-related topics. These topics included childhood sexual abuse, illicit drug use, prison involvement, living with a life-threatening illness and disconnection from, and reconnection with, ‘ordinary’ society. The reader will hear a description of the techniques of therapeutic songwriting itself. We will look at the songs which
Stewart and I wrote together, at the emotions they evoked, at the meaning Stewart’s songs had for him, and what role he thought they might have for him in the future.

This paper began as an exploration into some specific music therapy work with a particular client. It developed for me into a story of not one but two people and it eventually contained more emotional resonance than I expected, more layers of meaning than I had anticipated and greater understanding than I could have hoped for. This was not all anticipated. I was confident at the start that I was at least embarking on an exciting journey with a participant, acting as their guide as they discovered new experiences in a safe environment and capabilities that might surprise them. If the story had ended there, I believe I would have considered it a personal and professional success and therapeutically beneficial to the participant.

What ensued in addition to the above was a journey into establishing safe space for the emergence of possibility, connection and re-connection, and collaboration and hopefulness. Though for me this is certainly the story of two people its focus is of course on Stewart. I have tried to be mindful not to minimise my role, aware of a natural reticence to place myself onto centre stage, and I also hold the belief that a researcher’s own experiences cannot be subjectively laid aside while the business of ‘objective’ research resumes. This journey took my subject and me many places and some were unexpected. I hope the reader will find something in this journey that resonates with part of her or his own.
At The Centre

When I first met Stewart I was a newly hired music therapist at a health care facility ("the Centre") for individuals living with HIV/AIDS, or the human Immunovirus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. In addition to HIV health status, all Centre participants had been assessed to be 'at high risk for declining health.' ‘High risk’ was defined as living with some of these factors: drug addiction, poverty, unstable housing or homelessness, mental illness, restricted access to proper nutrition, few or no social supports, and survival of various types of abuse.

Most Centre participants were without significant family support. Many had extensive experience with correctional systems, usually from an early age. Almost ninety per cent lived with illicit substance use issues. Some were active users while others were in various stages of recovery. Among other social subgroups represented in the client population were intravenous drug users, those self-described as gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgendered, survivors of physical and sexual abuse, First Nations people and those living with mental health issues. Many crossed over into more than one category.

Stewart was in his first year of recovery from intravenous cocaine use. He was not able to work. His family lived thousands of kilometres away. Later I was to learn that he was also a survivor of child sexual abuse, had been a youth sex trade worker and had extensive involvement with the police, the courts and the corrections system.
Music therapy programming at the Centre typically consisted of therapeutic songwriting, interactive music making, improvisation, music and imagery/relaxation and a smaller component of music education. The therapeutic songwriting in which Stewart and I engaged forms the core of the work that I describe in this paper. I define therapeutic songwriting, as it relates to my work, within this paper's Methodology section.

I began by sharing with Stewart what I hoped we could achieve through therapeutic songwriting. I offered my definition of this activity and said that I generally hoped we would find areas of interest in his emotional life that he would be comfortable exploring in a musical way. I asserted that I intended it to be essentially an enjoyable exercise but if he felt uncomfortable at any time with the process then of course we would stop or change directions. He agreed and, besides being amenable to my intentions, declared that he, too, had goals. One was to become a better guitarist, another was to become a singer ("I have to learn how to sing!"), and another was to be a songwriter.

Background to Sessions

It is necessary to provide an overview of the intertwined factors that came into light during Stewart's sessions. These factors, each of which contributed its part to the overall condition of complex trauma, included surviving sexual abuse, involvement with the youth sex trades, intravenous drug use, contracting and living with HIV/AIDS, prison experience, recovery from drug use, and social stigma. I say 'intertwined' because Stewart's experiences of early sexual abuse led to feelings of confusion, a growing sense of danger, of "not belonging," and of isolation. These in turn led to his leaving school and his family, living on
the streets, engaging in drug use, turning to the sex trade as a money-making option, then to criminal activity for money when "I was too old" for the trade ("They want a younger body"). Inevitably, these behaviours led to the criminal justice system and imprisonment.

The cumulative effect of these various chronic traumatic life conditions was to produce and perpetuate, for Stewart, a particular mind-set or self-image. Before we look at the influence of these various elements in greater depth, I will touch on Herman’s work in ‘Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,’ or C/PTSD, as mentioned above and which we will later explore in greater depth.

“Trouble Blues” (Lightnin’ Hopkins) - Trauma and Complex Trauma

Herman, describing chronic trauma’s effects, writes: "While the victim of a single acute trauma may feel after the event that she is 'not herself,' the victim of chronic trauma may feel herself to be changed irrevocably, or she may lose the sense that she has any self at all" (p. 86). I believe that the combined influence of the factors I refer to thwarted Stewart’s development at crucial stages and that he ‘lost’ himself for many years.

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THIS WAS A REALLY TOUGH TIME FOR ME AND I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND IT ALL THAT WELL. IT WAS REALLY HARD GROWING UP WITH THIS ABUSE AND NOT HAVING ANYWHERE TO TURN...IT TORE ME APART INSIDE AS A KID.
```

These complex, interwoven elements were, in combination, still showing their effects on Stewart as an adult. He had progressed from addict to recovered
addict yet the feelings and beliefs he carried with him through his life were still largely with him. These included feeling that he was different, did not belong, there was 'no place' for him, that his experiences were unique and that he would not be understood.

“Dyin' With The Blues (Henderson) - HIV/AIDS ~

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, or AIDS, and HIV, the human immunovirus that precipitates the onset of AIDS, has progressed rapidly from emerging in Western consciousness in the 1980's to its present status as a global health crisis. In the West it was first a disease affecting mostly men who engaged in homosexual activity while in parts of Africa it was for a time 'the prostitute's disease' (while being a 'prostitute's customers' disease' as well). Wherever it appears, the disease quickly jumps from one population demographic to another. Today it is increasingly seen as a disease of poverty. That is, the numbers of new infections are highest amongst the world's poorest populations. These include women, aboriginal populations, the mentally ill and injection drug users. HIV is spread primarily through unprotected sexual activities, sharing of infected needles and transfusions of contaminated blood. Most of the Centre's participants, including Stewart, had become infected through the sharing of needles during intravenous drug use.

(Anyone is technically HIV negative [HIV-] until engagement in high-risk behaviours as listed above leads them to request a test for HIV. The presence in the blood of a specific level of antibodies, produced to fight infections, tells a physician that the patient is now HIV+. The presence of the antibodies has signalled to the physician that their patient's immune system is producing a
response to HIV infection. Because there is a period of up to several months before antibodies are produced in high enough numbers to be detectable, a patient who is concerned about their high-risk behaviour should be tested regularly to check for signs of antibody production).

His diagnosis of being HIV+ was only one of many elements that constituted the complex trauma with which Stewart lived, and a powerful one. Someone trying to escape being controlled and manipulated by others, and who is learning about initiative and self-efficacy, is perhaps exponentially affected by a diagnosis of a life-threatening illness for which there is yet no cure. It is a disease from which one cannot ‘escape.’ Clients have compared it to “sitting and waiting for something to get you.”

“Don’t Know If I’m Comin’ or Goin’” (Wainer, Fein) - Injection Drug Use

Injection drug use is another important element of the complex trauma with which Stewart lived. Had the drugs he chose to use early in his life been legally prescribed, and had his need for the effects such drugs provided been understood and accepted, he might one day have been in a position to consider getting treatment and fighting his addiction. Instead, Stewart was a classic victim of drug prohibition and the concomitant social stigma prevalent over most of the past eighty years.

Early in the 20th century, use of newly criminalised drugs such as heroin, cocaine, marijuana, opium and hashish gradually moved down the social ladder to gather mostly at the bottom rung (Hester & Egan, 1998). Prior to that time, addiction to prescribed heroin, cocaine or opium (either smoked, or as
laudanum, a tincture of opium) was a common and medical issue, causing little social damage.

Today, all of these drugs, and more, are prohibited substances. Use of them may be found in all social classes but the overwhelming numbers of users of illicit drugs are poor. In Canada and the U.S., drug abuse is particularly strong and growing amongst such sub-populations as First Nations people, the mentally ill (whose addicted members are termed living with ‘dual diagnosis’), poor women and prison populations.

Such was very true at the Centre. Illicit drug use was a factor for nearly 90% of participants. Some were in recovery. Most were in active addiction. The most common drugs used were heroin, cocaine and crystal methamphetamine (‘crystal’), all by injection though heroin was sometimes smoked by placing it on foil, heating it and inhaling the fumes (‘chasing the dragon’). The smoking of crack cocaine was also common. Marijuana was used extensively as well, sometimes for pain management and sometimes as an appetite stimulant, with minimal health detriments.

These prohibited drugs were easily available in Vancouver, the port city where this study took place. Alcohol was not a factor for most participants while tobacco was widely used. Stewart now smoked cigarettes but rarely used alcohol. He also smoked marijuana, sometimes for the effect but also to increase his appetite. Like many participants, the various antiretrovirals (ARV’s) he took for HIV infection dulled his appetite.
Stewart and his wife Lori, also a Centre participant, were not able to work due to their health status and they lived on their combined disability income. They were statistically poor by federal poverty guidelines. He had given up use of cocaine by injection only a few months prior to becoming a Centre participant. At the time we met he said he was “still struggling” with cravings for cocaine.

"Jail House Blues" (B. Smith & C. Williams) ~ Prison History ~

Often accompanying sexual abuse histories and illicit drug use is prison experience. I include it as another element of the complex trauma of Stewart’s life. Stewart had spent much of his adolescence, and the majority of his adult life, in juvenile halls or minimum and medium security incarceration. His sentences were always for drug related offences such as theft, break and enter, and being in possession of, or selling, stolen property. This history dated back to his youth in his hometown in Eastern Canada. He had, in fact, only recently been released, this time, he said, “for good.” Stewart told me that he used to almost enjoy going back to prison whenever he was newly sentenced because “I knew it so well and was so used to it. I would think ‘Hey, that’s where my bros are!’ This time, though, he was “sick of it.” Now out of jail less than a year, he had recently been tempted to use cocaine and had resisted after a great struggle.

For long-term inmates of correctional institutions, incarceration provides further separation from ‘normal’ society (Jackson, 2002). I write ‘further’ because, in the majority of cases, the person in question has usually lived with a higher degree than most in feeling like an ‘outsider,’ whose behaviour is misunderstood and who expects that their needs will not be met. In Stewart’s case, incarceration reinforced his experience of loss of control over his environment. He had, in his
recent steps toward re-integration into 'normal' society, recently married Lori. They shared many common background factors: sexual and physical abuse, living on the street, the sex trade, drug use and imprisonment and now HIV+ health status.

"Dark Is The Night" (BB King) - Sexual Abuse ~

Sexual abuse is a primary component of complex trauma. The scope and influence of sexual abuse within society is, I believe, still to be uncovered. For those who work within the various fields of psychotherapy, it emerges time and again as a turning point in the lives of astonishing numbers of clients. Referring to the addicts with whom he works, Gabor Maté (2003) writes, "without exception, they...were abused in childhood." Countless writers have traced the link from sexual and other physical abuse to subsequent illicit drug use (Herman, 1997, Duncan & Miller, 2000 et al). At the Centre, information of this type was usually anecdotally shared among staff members and not always included in a participant's file but it was widely known that abuse history played a substantial role in the lives of those with whom we worked.

Stewart described himself as “an inquisitive kid” who was interested in everything and “how it worked and where it went, and what went up and what went down.” There was, he said, “a lot of abuse” in his neighbourhood.
In Stewart's case complex trauma began with childhood sexual abuse, the main element in his early feelings of separation from 'normal' society, the society he believed he would have been part of had the abuse of his early years not occurred.

"Everything's Wrong, Ain't Nothin' Right" (Armstrong & Evans) - "Stuck"

Alongside a remarkable resilience displayed by Stewart and others at the Centre, which I describe in a moment, lurked a companion existence of fear, apprehension and anxiety. I was a daily witness to the phenomenon of resourceful, intelligent and resilient people who believed themselves to be, at heart, of little merit, with few coping skills, not 'as smart as' those who had 'normal' families. Most tended to live with a certain amount of self-adopted restriction in daily life such as lack of confidence to try new experiences, or a fear of new experiences.
Drug using participants tended to think of themselves, as did Stewart, as outsiders, 'on the edge' of respectability, unskilled and untrained for anything society required. They generally held low opinions of themselves; “I’m just a back alley junkie” one told me. Another, who sometimes stole from family members to buy drugs, said: “I can’t keep treating them like that; they deserve better than having somebody like me coming around (Italics added).” Before he made his commitment to get off drugs, Stewart declared that his self-esteem was “zero. I had none. I was a junkie and I was going to die a junkie.”

I saw Stewart’s overwhelming feelings that ‘nothing would change’ echoed daily by other participants. Many believed that positive change would not happen for them. Those for whom this was most true tended to be people who had struggled longest with addictions, and abuse survivors. The cycle of addiction was an important element of their feeling ‘stuck.’ Added to these elements was the medical condition of being HIV+, which meant that the person could expect to one day develop AIDS.

Doubling the sense of hopelessness for many was a diagnosis of HIV+ while still addicted to drugs. Struggling to gain control over their addictions, those newly diagnosed with HIV now had to deal with an intractable infection that would only get worse. With their feeling of being ‘trapped’ now compounded by a life-threatening illness, many infected addicts gave up striving to get off drugs. They continued on the treadmill of withdrawal pains, finding drugs, getting high, coming down, suffering withdrawal, looking for ways to get their next fix, and on and on. So pervasive was the cycle that they often could not give attention to maintaining proper housing, personal relationships, nutrition or
cleanliness. Anger, depression and other forms of distancing often masked the low sense of self-worth mentioned earlier.

Worse, this feeling of being unable to ‘move’ or progress in a satisfactory way extended to areas beyond addictions. Lack of movement or positive change in many ways was a component of the daily narratives I encountered. It could be reflected in a participant’s reported need to change their housing, yet being unable to gather the energy resources needed to look for themselves, or to seek assistance. Other feelings of being ‘stuck’ also did not directly involve drug use. Many times I spoke with people who did not engage in any new activities. Even though there are countless possibilities for such experiences in a large urban setting, many of them free, participants often did not take advantage of them, show interest or even express a desire to do so.

“The Sun’s Gonna Shine In My Back Door Someday” (Broonzy) - Resiliency

And yet I also witnessed the ability to change, and evidence of past change, that negated the current belief that it could not happen. Contained within Stewart’s remarkable story of abuse, abandonment, confusion, danger and instability was another one of survival, resiliency, determination and creativity. One could not get from where Stewart began to where he was when we met without marshalling extraordinary resources. He had, after all, recently extricated himself from drug addiction, was recently released from prison, had entered a new relationship deciding it would be permanent, and was committed to becoming a productive member of the community and a musician as he had always wanted to be. On the other hand, he often found it difficult to motivate himself (“just lazy sometimes”). He still found drugs to be an exceptional
temptation ("I was having an argument with Lori, and I told her 'I'm going for a walk', meaning going to get some dope, and I don't know how I stopped myself, but I went home"). Yet inside each of these vignettes I could see strengths. Self-described as "lazy," Stewart was still in the music room each day, eager to learn and to assist other less experienced participants, helping to move equipment into the living room for weekly jam sessions, going for walks with his wife and shopping for items for their new apartment. Believing he was weak because he experienced temptation, he minimised the fact that he had ultimately not chosen to use drugs that day.

I found Stewart to be gentle, kind, funny and very eager to learn. He had an excellent sense of humour, loved to laugh, and was very much a 'live and let live' sort of individual. I also had the impression that he thought of himself as 'behind' in development, as a musician and also as a person. Often in his self-observations I felt he was revealing this in such expressions as "There's a lot I don't know", "I'm way behind, Jeff" and "I don't know if I can do it."

One can see two conflicting sides to Stewart's make-up. One was a steady, quiet individual, confident in his interests and even in some of his capabilities. The other was frightened of failure, restricted by forces largely unseen, not at all certain that life would get any easier. I felt that his story, a much more exaggerated version of the one which most of us live with, could be looked upon as two arms reaching out: one threatening, restricting but familiar, the other inviting, interesting but new and potentially frightening. I wanted Stewart's resiliency to be our companion in the writing and rewriting of his story.
Chapter Summary

Following this introductory section, Chapter Two looks at writings from the music therapy literature that describes particular therapists' uses of songwriting. Some approaches are improvisational while others are more formalised. There are both case studies and group efforts. All works deal with specific client populations. Each one's particular relevance to the work detailed in this paper will be discussed in the Analysis chapter.

In Chapter Three I offer the theoretical viewpoints that have guided this study. Some of the theorists are, of course, music therapists. I have also taken guidance from others outside of the field whose approaches were relevant adjuncts to this study. I also include within this chapter a theoretical basis for including my own experience of the therapeutic process.

Chapter Four details the methodology I employed in the therapeutic songwriting process. Some elements were mapped out beforehand and formalised while others were decisions made in the moment as deemed appropriate. Some of the descriptions include rationale for the choices offered, selection of songwriting topics, choice of musical elements and genres, and lyric reflection. I offer the actual songwriting techniques in some detail, believing they may be of use to other therapists in facilitating this activity with participants.

Chapter Five, Findings & Analysis, offers my findings based on the data I gathered, the field notes I kept, the songs themselves and numerous follow-up questions and answers. Here we reflected upon the content of Stewart's songs,
their relevance to his life and discussed how to elaborate upon them for future writing.

In Chapter Six I offer a summary discussion of our efforts and offer my recommendations to colleagues who wish to undertake similar music therapy work. Chapter Seven contains my concluding remarks. Throughout the chapters I offer, where appropriate, autoethnographic sections detailing moments when the work at hand prompted self-reflection that I deemed useful to the therapeutic process.
Chapter Two – Literature Review

When questioning how therapeutic songwriting could be harnessed to therapeutic benefit, I saw the need to view the imminent work from as many perspectives as possible. This stemmed partly from a natural interest in others’ experiences, and also a desire to ‘see’ myself in others, particularly participants in the therapeutic process, in order to both ‘ground’ myself and to establish connection with them and the environment we would create. I was also motivated by a perceived lack in the therapeutic arts, certainly within medical models of treatment, to acknowledge that the ‘distance’ between clients and therapists is, in part, a creation of therapeutic communities. I believed I saw too much of therapist complacence with the status quo and its hierarchical structure, and had a desire to see the ‘playing field’ of therapy made more level, and its complexities realised and utilised for more generalised and integrated healing.

I have a natural impatience with the paradigm of ‘expert and patient’ that medical structures encourage between therapist and client. With regard to my work with Stewart, for example, I was not comfortable with the word ‘client,’ certainly not with ‘patient,’ and was grateful that the Centre had long ago adopted the term ‘participant’ for the population it served. At the same time, I endeavoured to be mindful that the clinical distance not disappear; as therapists know, it is ethically necessary. I tried to remain aware of the similarities that
Stewart and I shared. I also kept in mind my sense that he believed there existed a greater distance between us than actually did.

As I have written, this paper is a qualitative study conducted with a particular man living with a number of factors that most of us do not have to contend with. I believe it is useful for its universal as well as its personal qualities. It was inevitable that my own experiences play a part in it and I am grateful that current literature is supportive of the premise that truly objective work is not desirable or even truly possible (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Wolcott, 2001 and others). As I have suggested, and describe later, my own experiences came to play a larger part in this story than I could have predicted, their importance arriving as it did during the analysis phase of writing.

Introduction - What Is Happening When 'It' Is Happening?

I naturally came up against questions particular to musical experiences. As examples, I wondered, "What does music provide that other elements cannot?" "When one is enjoying the activity of songwriting, what is happening?" "What is changing?" "What is it they are enjoying?" "Is this only a musical experience (whatever that might be) or can it have other resonance in their life?" Music therapy research addresses many of these questions. I review work that I found in my search for common purpose in the struggle to define effective clinical work. I pay particular attention to work that addresses the issues cited below because those issues played crucial roles in Stewart's worldview and self-definition.
In music therapy literature where songwriting is utilised we find work conducted with clients living with addiction issues, HIV/AIDS, prison histories and childhood sexual abuse, all factors within the complex trauma of Stewart's life. There seemed little written about working with people who had contracted HIV from intravenous drug use (excluding Lee’s [1996] improvisational work in palliative care which my work did not replicate) or work that centred on trauma survivors additionally living with HIV and a drug use history. I found myself, then, identifying with pieces of ‘the puzzle’ in various writers’ work. I sensed that I had something original to add to the body of clinical knowledge by addressing the complex problems of those struggling with all the above factors. I also employed Kenny’s (1996) conceptual framework The Field of Play, a theoretical construct for music therapists, as a theoretical basis for the work I conducted.

In addition to the music therapy literature that outlines theory or describes songwriting as a therapeutic intervention, I have taken advantage of writings outside the field in order to augment those works. Herman (1997), already mentioned, developed the category of Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to differentiate the effects of long-term traumatic experiences from the experiences of survivors of one time traumatic or catastrophic events. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) (chik-ZEN-muh-hi) developed the concept of ‘flow’ to describe the state of complete involvement in an experience. White and Epston (1990) created ‘narrative therapy’ techniques in order to ‘externalise’ one’s problems and ‘reauthor’ one’s experiences.
Music Therapy & Songwriting

Alliance Building in Group Settings

Tania Cordobés (1997) and Cindy Edgerton (1990) each used songwriting to facilitate cohesion within therapeutic groups. I include their work here as they related to my attempts to build rapport with participants, particularly Stewart, and to promote discussion of meaning and context. Cordobés (1997) utilised songwriting as a means to create group cohesion in HIV+ adults who were additionally living with depression. Her study focused mainly on verbalisation and expression of emotion where this paper includes the spoken as well as the musical ‘word’. In her discussion Cordobés concludes that the results did not support her hypothesis due to small sample size and lack of random sampling. However, she did posit that songwriting provided participants an experience that fostered “coherent language, multiple perspectives, insights, problem solving and emotional reaction” (p. 62). She also asserts that group songwriting provided clients with three elements whereby they could find meaning:

1. creating a work
2. encountering others, and
3. self-transcendency (Frankl, 1984)

Cordobés’ elements of ‘meaning finding,’ ‘insights’ and ‘emotional reaction’ proved especially relevant to the work described here and I refer to them in the Discussion chapter.
Rapport Building & Adolescents

Edgerton (1990) also hoped to increase group cohesion, this time in work with adolescents. She found songwriting to be effective in increasing self-esteem and supporting self-expression. Edgerton notes that her songwriting intervention was a result of a need she perceived to provide “a success-oriented activity” (p. 19) with clients. I, too, witnessed benefits to participants, in this case study, Stewart, enjoying the feeling of success that comes with task completion. This paper also details the companion successes I observed that were particularly relevant to one having survived multiple traumas.

As did Edgerton I, too, observed participants, of which Stewart was just one, experiencing pride in their creations in an enterprise that was new to most of them. Edgerton also reported that each success brought a sense of belonging to participants. Stewart and I examined his sense of self-worth during his times of trouble and also today, both in terms of what he felt generally contributed to it and what role songwriting played in supporting it. I strove to additionally go beyond merely supporting Stewart’s expression of self so that we might ascertain what ‘self’ meant to him, how much of it was a creation of others, and what elements were currently useful to him, worthy of retention and expansion.

Freed & New Coping Strategies

Freed (1987) used songwriting with chemically dependent persons, noting that her participants learned new coping strategies through lyric analysis and received validation for their feelings from other group members. She also listed basic psychological needs that must be met before new strategies can be learned:
• to share thoughts and feelings
• to feel competent
• to know they 'belong' and are united with others in some (positive) way
• for affection
• for pleasurable sensory nourishment

Each of these points held relevance for our songwriting efforts as we will see in the Analysis chapter. Freed also facilitated activity that encouraged expression of client feelings that related directly to their situation. Stewart and I, too, wrote and examined his songs with exactly these elements in mind. And, unlike this study, Freed initiated the confrontation of losses for her participants and made metaphor a primary tool in the therapeutic process.

**ficken & Robb: Psychiatric & Brain Injury**

Ted ficken (sic, 1976) studied songwriting as a tool for use in a psychiatric setting. His work provides cross-referencing possibilities for engaging participants who live with dual diagnosis (illicit drug use and mental illness). Robb (1996) conducted a study with brain-injured adolescents. In her paper she focused to a large degree upon the songwriting techniques themselves. I, too, found it very necessary to include, in the Methodology chapter, a detailed account of the songwriting techniques I used.

**O'Callaghan, O'Brien & The Song Writing Paradigm**

Clare O'Callaghan (1996) developed the *Song Writing Paradigm* to better facilitate clients' songwriting. She conducted her study in a palliative care setting in Melbourne, Australia where she found themes in her clients' work that I also
found in my own. Her paradigm makes allowance for variation according to
differing client cognitive or physical abilities. It contains eleven points and
parallels remarkably the steps I employed in my study. Seeing that they embrace
universally useful principles applicable to work of this kind, I list them here and,
in the Discussion chapter, I describe where my technique differed.
O'Callaghan's Paradigm follows:

1. Song writing is offered to a client if it seems appropriate.
2. A topic is chosen or suggested.
3. Brainstorming on the chosen topic.
4. Ideas that emerge are grouped, by the therapist, into themes.
5. Choice of key is offered: major of minor.
6. Rhythm is decided upon using techniques derived from client's speech
   patterns while verbalizing the lyrics.
7. Preferred mood styles are ascertained.
8. Melodic contours are suggested by client for each lyrical line, after being
given a choice of two melodic fragments for each line of the song.
9. Client chooses accompaniment, dynamics, tempo, instrumentation and
   voicing.
10. Client is invited to name the song.
11. The song is written out and then, if possible, recorded.

O'Callaghan used a modified grounded theory research approach
(Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Its use of content analysis
stressed the importance of identifying themes and categories that emerge from
analyses rather than first constructing categories and then inevitably searching
for them (1996). In this study I, too, found it necessary to allow themes to emerge from the data. The writing of the songs began with specific instructions and suggestions but the highly individual content of the works created would have rendered prior categorisation impossible and not productive for the purposes of the project.

O'Brien (2004), influenced by O'Callaghan's work, used similar techniques and grouped them under the headings Brainstorming, Reframing, Determining Style and Key, and Setting Melody and Accompaniment. She developed a technique for analysis of verbal interaction between therapist and client that I did not require for this study but her techniques do share some similarities with the work described here. Later I discuss O'Callaghan's and O'Brien's points as they relate to this work.

Companions to Music Therapy ~

In addition to the music therapy literature I have, as mentioned, found the writings of Csikszentmihalyi (1990), White & Epston (1995), Mahoney (1995) and Herman (1992) particularly useful. Csikszentmihalyi and White & Epston follow, while I discuss Mahoney and Herman later in this chapter.

"Flow"

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) developed the concept of flow, hypothesising that a person's total involvement in a task or experience could provide them with a unique growth experience. This experience is facilitated through engagement with the elements of flow, which are:
narrowing concentration until fully absorbed
performing at the upper edge of ability but with a sense of ease
unselfconsciousness
altered sense of time perception
a sense of reward to be found in the activity itself, apart from the final product (1990).

Csikszentmihalyi offers a theoretical basis for the enjoyment of activities, in our case, therapeutic songwriting. People first need to believe, he writes, that they can complete the task and be able to concentrate on it. The task must have clear goals, offer immediate feedback, and one’s involvement must remove them from the “worries and frustrations of everyday life” (p. 49). The experience must also offer a sense of control over one’s actions. Interestingly, concern for one’s elf will disappear yet one’s sense of self will emerge even stronger once the experience is done. Lastly, the sense of time will alter. The combined experience will cause a deep sense of satisfaction and enjoyment such that one feels “expending a great deal of energy is worthwhile simply to be able to feel it” (p. 49).

As do others (Mahoney, 1999 et al) Csikszentmihalyi asserts that we must all construct ‘meaning’ for our lives (1990). He maintains that it does not even matter what we give our attention to so long as it is “compelling enough to order a lifetime’s worth of psychic energy” (p. 215). He cites three essential elements:

• purpose, or the setting of goals for one’s actions
• *resolution*, or expending effort to achieve those goals regardless of whether one achieves what one set out to do

• *harmony*, the result of the first two steps, achieved when the goal is "pursued with resolution and one’s actions contribute to "a unified flow experience” (p. 217).

There is little question in my mind that Stewart and I experienced ‘flow’ during this work. In later chapters I present more fully my witnessing of this process during our songwriting experience.

“The Story of Me” (Everly) - Narrative Therapy's Externalising and Re-authoring

Drawn to narrative approaches to psychotherapy I discovered the approaches of Jerome Bruner (1990), Michael White and David Epston (1990, 1995), and Daniel McAdams (1993). I saw that I was using some narrative therapy concepts within therapeutic songwriting and felt that I could adapt more of them. Principles that particularly stood out as relevant were *externalisation of problems* and the *re-authoring* of one’s life (White & Epston, 1990).

In externalisation of problems a person is encouraged to personify difficulties, to see ‘the problem’ as a force that visits one rather than it being a core part of one’s psychological makeup. A ‘problem’ thus becomes external to the person themselves (1990). One is not ‘an angry man’; rather, one sometimes ‘has anger’. The client believes for the moment that anger will help and invariably it precipitates the opposite or rather provides momentary relief then long-term difficulties. The task becomes to identify when this happens, what
precedes it, what responses feel involuntary, what would one prefer to happen, etc.

The client is encouraged to look for exceptions to the problem. When in the past has it not ‘got its way?’ How did the client resist? How did they manage to overcome their established habit that one time? Who do they know who might not have been surprised by their resistance? A companion element to this is new awareness of and acknowledgement that one’s self-view is often a result of having internalised society’s views of one’s self. This is a particularly significant element for marginalised people and groups, or anyone who has been separated ‘singled out’ from the dominant society. The “normalising gaze” (p. 30) of the more powerful can inhibit and influence the less powerful and less acceptable. As examples, White, Epston (1990) and others cite the normalising gaze upon women by men, upon drug addicts or sex trade workers by ‘respectable’ society, upon aboriginal people by the dominant population, etc. Externalising the problem can thus be seen as a first step in liberating oneself from subjugation and other inequities of power. One is then free to re-write their ‘story of self’, and to correct the false ‘truths’ about one’s self which have been assimilated.

The story then demands “reauthoring” (p. 42). Here, the goal is to generate alternate stories that incorporate skills, knowledge, and power previously demonstrated in one’s life, but neglected through the subjugation of those faculties by dominant powers. White and Epston (1990) cite the strategy of narrative as metaphor for the retelling of one’s story. They maintain that, in regarding one’s life as narrative, “the text analogy” (p. 9) provides that “every reading...is a new interpretation... and thus a different writing of it” (italics
added). In clinical application, the therapist has assisted the client in viewing this new narrative as a co-creation by client and therapist but reflecting the client’s experience. That experience will now be seen from a perspective distinct from the habitual ‘problem-saturated’ one. The new ‘re-authored’ story will in fact have both a new history and a new present.

Through interviews and songs Stewart and I laid the groundwork for a constructive re-authoring of his life. We, in fact, wrote many songs after this study formally concluded, and in different ways each one extended or elaborated on the themes of ‘rewriting’, positive change, rediscovering old strengths and the quest for wholeness. Later I describe the circumstances around the writing of one ‘extra project’ song as an example of that continuing process.
Chapter Three – The Theoretical

~ AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

My assumptions, expectations and “conditioned emotional responses” formed a background to our work, though Stewart was not always aware of it. I spoke to him several times of my bias in favour of reform of drug laws, my dissatisfaction with the status quo particularly as it treats those at the bottom of the social ladder, and of other responses I had. During analysis of our completed songs, detailed in Chapter Four, I note instances where I asserted my own ‘agenda.’ Rather than be concerned that this should not have happened, I chose to embrace the individuality that it represented, and the role it played in my joining with Stewart as a companion on his journey.

Somewhere Else

A large part of this journey involves attempts to describe what are essentially transporting experiences. I am in agreement with Kenny (1998) who observes that the best moments in music therapy “are when I find myself in a state of aesthetic arrest” (p. 215). By this she means an elevating that “validates my existence as a human being” (p. 215). This transporting of one beyond their ordinary experience again bears witness to the paradox of universality: it is the intensely personal experience that provides a “sense of connection, evoking, for Kenny, the “interconnectedness of all things” (p. 215).
In all the minute examination, inward gazing and self-scrutiny that such a project can entail, I believe that both Stewart and I experienced those moments of transportedness. The self-scrutiny was likely necessary to the process, as many theorists suggest. Each time we instinctively agreed upon a suggestion, whenever phrasing of lyrics came together naturally and musically, whenever the poetry in Stewart’s lyrics rang true, and when we sang a completed song for the first time, I was certainly elevated beyond everyday experience.

Though being moved beyond ordinary experience was not a clinical goal, from experience I was aware that successful songwriting could provide this, and more. Through expansion of the experiential, which included ‘transportedness,’ Stewart and I investigated the world of meaning making (Greenberg & Safran, 1987, Mahoney, 1993 et al). Meaning and context proved to be core factors in our work. The reader will see how we chose each element that constitutes a song as we determined their meaning for Stewart. I describe the context in which I made suggestions, weigh them against each other and consider their benefits and potential harms. This will include examination of my motives in constructing such a study, selecting the participant I did and, in fact, every other choice that I presented. The journey will include, too, an examination of my own experiences and their place in the emerging story.

I begin by looking briefly at the dichotomy, suggested earlier, that exists when acknowledging the universality of the deeply personal experience, as well as the inverse: the personal application of universal principles.
The Individualised Universal Language

The work that Stewart and I accomplished together was sometimes intensely personal. We had, though, the opportunity to examine that deep personal experience in light of its usefulness in helping to guide him in his understanding of his present and potential place within a larger society from which he had been largely excluded. At other times, our discourse was more philosophical and universal, generated by the personal nature of what had just taken place in session.

Both the trained musician and the musically ‘untrained’ person who enjoys music but considers themselves “not musical” have a similarly difficult time answering the question, “What is music?” Music therapists certainly spend time contemplating this question. When they do they often come up against a paradox: what is routinely called a ‘universal language’ is actually dependent upon circumstance, context and individual experience and interpretation for its meaning to be revealed (Mishler, 1979).

What Is It? – Bunt

Music therapist Leslie Bunt (1994) believes that because there is so much yet to discover about human emotional response to music the quest leads one to continually face the philosophical question: “What is music”? Since music is essentially a “complex web of expressively organised sounds” (p. 46), we might ask ourselves what is it that gives those sounds such expression? Bunt asserts that we cannot ignore that each element that makes up what we term music – timbre,
loudness, pitch, etc. - is itself subject to “context, ... behavioural state and cultural conditioning” (p. 46). All is relative, he says.

**How To Find It? - Ruud**

Music therapist Even Ruud (1998) notes that positivist approaches – measurement of blood pressure, galvanic skin responses, etc. – cannot tell us about an individual’s personal experience of music or about any innate or imposed structure or meaning in the music itself. He notes the challenge, particularly in North America, of claiming music therapy’s efficacy while not noting that it so often occurs in institutional settings “forgetting the surrounding society” (p. 9). Referring to social constructivism, Ruud cites the decline of science’s search for a single truth and the growing acknowledgement “that people interpret reality differently” (p. 12).

I sensed that much of Stewart’s life had been lived in a ‘surrounding society’ increasingly restricted and defined, designed not by him but largely by social policy. As mentioned, assisting him to interpret, re-interpret and express his experiences, both musical and not, was a primary goal of this study.

**Ruud and Musical Meanings**

More recently, Ruud (2002) offers some thoughts that further support the necessity to consider context and individual interpretation when discussing music therapy’s effectiveness. He asserts that music therapy has closer links to “philosophical and musicological tradition(s) rather than to the biomedical...” (p. 149). Ruud cites, as an example, documentation that refers to the therapeutic effects of “philosophy of ragas” in the Indian healing tradition, and he notes the
crucial element of the listener/participant’s familiarity with the particular musical structures, melodies and rhythms. So particular and powerful are these elements that, to the participant enculturated to these forms, the effect can be dramatic. An ‘outsider,’ however, might wonder what it was they had just heard.

In describing music therapy in relation to personal experience, Ruud quotes Kramer (in Gouk, 2000, p. 146). Kramer, too, maintains that effectiveness is dependent upon not merely the music alone but on the listener/participant’s “apprehension” of the process “in experience” (p. 146). *Because* it is so dependent upon experience, music’s therapeutic influence is governed by cultural conditions that both legitimate the particular therapeutic endeavour as well as prepare the intended client demographic to accept the healing influence of the therapy. When healing rituals employ music, there exist so many “shared assumptions...expectations and conditioned emotional responses” (p. 146) within the culture itself that they find their way into the music itself.

I introduced such consideration into our sessions as I strove to expand the ‘space’ within which Stewart and I worked. I noted his high comfort level with specific musical forms and I regularly presented other, less familiar ones. I did this not as a means to create music with which I would be more pleased but to present options for him to consider. This would, I hoped, prepare and familiarise him with concepts such as variation, positive change, safe forward movement and recognising the new in the old and the old in the new.
"Mansion On The Hill" (H. Williams) – Reed's "Master Key"

Therapist Karen Reed (2000) describes the music therapy experience metaphorically. The mind is a mansion, music is the master key to its rooms and the therapist is key master. Reed's mansion has doors, staircases and rooms, each of which provides structure for the individual. Doors may both conceal and provide access to the emotional life. The various locks are 'guards' that preserve the integrity of the separation of the interior life from the external.

In a sense it is Stewart's experience of his 'self' that is presented here. I believe he would agree that his 'mansion' had many locked doors and that much of his emotional experience had been inaccessible by any staircase with which he was familiar. Through the process of his songwriting, examination of what we created, its meaning to him and how he could integrate this 'new' knowledge back into his life today, I believe he discovered 'new rooms' in his house as well as forgotten ones he was once too fearful to enter.

"Mindful Inquiry" – Bentz & Shapiro

In applying myself to such a personal endeavour as co-creating songs with a client, and examining personal material in depth, I required ethical guidelines. The framework of Mindful Inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998) emphasises that the researcher must use the information they gather in a positive and productive way and encourages that she/he maintain "their own personal identity in the onslaught of the information age" (p. 36). Four basic tenets of this philosophy are critical theory, hermeneutics, phenomenology and Buddhism.
Critical Theory

Sometimes called critical theory of society, this is a research tradition that focuses on easing suffering through examination of, and changing, social and political sources of oppression (1998). As stated, I made it clear to Stewart that I had strong feelings about oppression of drug users through social policy, moralising on the part of policymakers, and hypocrisy in stigmatising some drugs (intravenous, uncertain quality, specific ethnic associations) and not others (prescribed, middle class, controlled and affordable). I shared with him what I felt were these factors' roles in some of his own life situations. I explained that I hoped my opinions on these subjects were not a barrier to our working together, and that I did not insist that he share my views. We did, however, tend to agree on these points though Stewart had not, he said, given so much thought to some of them. Our points of agreement provided support to the creation of the therapeutic bond that we soon enjoyed.

Stewart and I additionally had discussions about physical and sexual abuse of young boys and how social pressure to adopt traditional masculine responses to it has delayed adult men in coming forward with their stories of youthful abuse, almost a generation after women and girls have had that 'permission'. We also discussed society's views of drug users and people who had been in prison, the culture created by those views, and how those views were often internalised until society's view of them (worthless, amoral, untrustworthy) became their own dominant view of themselves.
Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is a branch of study that focuses on interpretation of text. It originated in examination of Biblical writings and has been expanded to include theories of understanding and interpretation. More recently, it has further extended its scope to include understanding of existence and "being in general" (p. 40). Hermeneutics specifically asks us to pay attention to how our understandings and interpretations are shaped by our particular cultures and historical situations because we constantly use the "concepts, language, symbols, and meaning of our time" (p. 40) to interpret the world to ourselves.

This study is not a strictly hermeneutic one though text analysis came into play during consideration of the study data. Stewart and I extensively examined both the context and the meanings of all his choices. We looked primarily at his lyrics but also at the genre and musical choices he made. We discussed what each of these decisions meant to him as well as to the songs themselves. We tried to determine where he believed his songs 'fit', both in his life and in the world's repertoire of songs. In follow-up discussions he and I discussed the cultural and historical aspects of his choices, what they meant to him, and how they might guide him in future writing.

Phenomenology

This is a philosophical tradition that looks at descriptions of consciousness and at the world as perceived by our consciousness (1998). In particular, phenomenology insists that we recognise and examine those elements that we take for granted, e.g. assumptions about reality, behaviour, knowledge, etc. which often go unquestioned. In this way one is better able to reframe one's
knowledge of the world by focusing on the "complex and elaborate structures" (p. 41) by which we each construct our own consciousness.

My intention in applying aspects of phenomenology to our work was to find out how creation of consciousness might figure in Stewart's assessment of his own life situation. I intended to use phenomenological examination to determine the rules and roles Stewart lived by and with, which of those rules and roles were his and which did he feel had been socially imposed. I was accustomed to Stewart and other participants with similar histories believing themselves to be people for whom positive change was unlikely. Further, exceptions to this stance were often expressed as grandiose plans or unrealistic expectations, for example, 'planning' to win the lottery or predicting that our recording would "go to number one" on the charts. This departure from what I defined as realistic or reasonable was an area of interest worth exploring. What did Stewart believe was likely or unlikely to happen in his life? What and who had been, and were now, creating Stewart's consciousness?

Buddhism

A doctrine of Buddhism is that we each have tolerance for "various ideas and frames of reference" (p. 39). As is social theory, Buddhism too is concerned with elimination of suffering though it looks at the role played by consciousness and unconsciousness in the creation of suffering. The overcoming of illusions and socially imposed roles, and awareness of self and of the self's environment, played significant roles in guiding this study. Though not a Buddhist I naturally wished to facilitate reduction of suffering. I mindfully suggested new ideas, approaches and choices to Stewart throughout our work, aware that ambiguity
and other ‘frames of reference’ could arise and should be welcomed. From the start of the study he was amenable to suggestions, declaring himself recently becoming more accustomed to considering new ‘paths’ and possibilities in daily life. He was also open to discussing the overcoming of illusions, a key factor in recovery from drug addiction, and very open to discussion of socially imposed roles and identities, two key elements of the marginalised life.

I strove to incorporate the traditions described above into my research methods, and also into the counselling methods I used, the therapeutic alliance that Stewart and I created together, and my interpretation of what I found. I attempted to transcend my biases as I became aware of them.

Within their four intellectual traditions, Bentz & Shapiro (1998) also stress that, to be mindful, one must consider:

- awareness of self and reality and their interaction
- tolerating and integrating multiple perspectives
- looking at the consciousness and unconsciousness that underlie assumptions
- accepting bias and trying to transcend it
- awareness of the cultural, historical, economic and political structures that shape us, and which ones have domination and oppression built into them
- caring for the world and the human life that one studies
- desire to eliminate or diminish suffering, and awareness of how much suffering is “required by existing arrangements” (p. 6)
- critique of existing values, illusions and practices that are harmful
- both transcending and grounding in self
• making development of awareness not merely a cognitive process but a part of one's way of living one's life.

I was mindful that my responses to social issues were often emotional and when working with Stewart I was faced with several issues upon which I have strong opinions and have touched upon already: drug policy, childhood abuse, prison culture and social marginalisation as examples. My reactions tended to be stronger when I identified social policy as a primary source of those conditions. Thus, awareness and transcendence of self were very significant elements. In particular, while writing this paper, as I have mentioned and refer to in more depth in the Discussion chapter, conscious awareness of self for a time even assumed centre stage.

~ AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

In this study it was a challenge to attempt at each stage to determine what each decision Stewart and I made meant to him and secondarily to me. The primary focus was naturally on Stewart’s preferences and choices yet my influence was considerable. I had written the interview questions and chosen the songwriting topics, after all. I had done so partly as a means of gathering information and partly to stoke the creative fires in session, yet I again note how I tried to acknowledge my own personal interest in urging Stewart and pilot study participants in the directions we went.

When working with Stewart I needed to consider other biases. I recognised that we were two European-Canadian men with post World War II rhythm and blues, country music and rock and roll forming part of the
'soundtrack' of our lives. I was also aware of the status quo nature of the music we were creating. Rock and roll and the blues were parts of a heritage once considered dangerous and even subversive but could now be found in children's recordings and television commercials. Time and familiarity had contributed to the transformation of these genres from establishment fighting, or at least moderately socially unacceptable, to being mainstream components of the modern cultural landscape.

In professional life I was making attempts to distance myself from the very genres that attracted Stewart the most. After many years of performing and writing, I was ready for new 'sounds'. I was learning new instruments, experimenting with new guitar tunings and altogether certain that I need never hear a standard blues guitar solo ever again. Yet this contrasted with where Stewart found himself. In an echo of the beginning of my own career thirty years before, he was learning blues scales on the electric guitar, how the blues influenced rock and roll, how songs were written, etc. A small tug of war in my mind, between his desires and my own professional development, arose. From them emerged these questions and answers:

Q. How much did I want to stay away from this template?
A. "Personally and professionally very much but clinically I am happy to go wherever my client's tastes want to go. It is in the interpretation of what we create that the therapeutic component is likely to be found."

Q. Was there not therapeutic benefit to joining him as a guide or mentor, using all of my experiences?
A. The answer was guardedly "yes," given that one need be mindful of which experiences one shared in the clinical setting.
Q. What if I suggested that Stewart try something very foreign to him such as hip-hop or rap? Could he, or any client, be ‘harmed’ by being steered away from what he wanted to do, which in Stewart’s case was to create blues and rock and roll songs that fit into the established traditions he so admired?

A. Music therapists need to be aware that the seemingly ‘harmless’ tool of music can be damaging. Any intervention capable of great success is capable of being hurtful, confusing, misleading, disrespectful, not supportive, etc. It seemed that if doubt arose we should go where he wanted to go. I was confident that we would still be able to engage in emotional investigation, as well as a gratifying aesthetic experience, using any means he preferred including his desired, and my slightly dreaded, musical forms.

**Aigen’s ‘Aesthetic’**

Aigen suggests that a broad “expansive theory” (p. 236) of aesthetics is required. He concluded (in Kenny, 1995) that his own “capacity for aesthetic experience” (p. 255) had enjoyed expansion and now included musical elements he once considered disorganised, unpleasant, ugly, dissonant, etc. (I would add “tiresome, dated, clichéd”). Aigen maintains that if there is beauty in the aesthetic and if the aesthetic “is the human person” (Kenny, p. 93), then none of these elements, whether human development, growth, change or beauty, can possibly be static. He and others note that clinical outcome is not an achievement tallied at the conclusion of therapeutic process but “unfolds within the clinical process itself” (p. 239).

I had of course seen positive therapeutic results in participants’ songwriting when established musical/cultural ‘norms’ were adopted and not challenged. It had sometimes been an aid to participant realisation of their ‘true’ emotional state(s). I kept my frustration with the mainstream in the background
while we worked in areas that, for a multitude of reasons, had particular meaning for the client. We would, I concluded, go where he wanted to go and I would keep in mind the option to present 'foreign' elements if he seemed ready for whatever they represented to him. We eventually did, for example, use a rap style for part of the vocalisation of song No. 2, “I Am Your Son” which proved a valuable decision for the project. I describe this later.

**Bright’s Grief & Loss**

Discussion of work with one living with HIV/AIDS makes it essential to discuss grief and loss. Though at the time of writing a person newly diagnosed as HIV positive could expect to live for many years, living with the human immunovirus has the predictable effect of generating thoughts of reduced mortality, premature ageing and fear of painful lingering death. This in particular is difficult for many within the recovering drug addict population. The chaotic nature of daily life for both active and recovering addicts is often reduced to considering life on a daily basis, sometimes a few hours at a time.

Stewart had been through the early panic that often follows a diagnosis of HIV + status. When he heard that he was infected, his first instinct was “to do so much drugs that it would kill me.” His fear of dying of AIDS initially overrode his fear of dying from overdose, perhaps highlighting the greater fear of the unknown over the familiar, or perhaps the desire to be the decision-maker in one’s death. Stewart did not know much about AIDS at the time of his diagnosis. He *did* know that AIDS does not affect only the gay population because prison
had educated him otherwise (HIV transmission was, and is, a considerable concern in prisons). Stewart was sure of one fact: HIV “would kill you fast.”

Such is the worry for many living with HIV/AIDS that one could be said to be in a state of grieving one’s life own death soon after the diagnosis. The sense of loss is often enormous. Later, the reality of one’s loss can become much more concrete if one loses contact with their family or friends as a result, as Stewart had. He told me that he had lived for years as many addicted to street drugs do: on the run either from police or towards the next drug source, and performing the criminal behaviour that drug use demands. And, he said, “the years go by fast.” Stewart’s wife Lori corroborates the passage of time: “I tell kids using dope today, ‘You’re having a party and then one day you’re gonna wake up and find you’re forty.’”

Bright (1996) sees an advantage in using songwriting for purposes of grief expression. Music from a particular period in one’s life can, in her observation, bring to the surface all the feelings from the past when the music was first experienced, including all the sadness and disappointments “together with present loneliness” (p. 58). Bright is a strong proponent of the playing of “significant music” (p. 58) as a means to catharsis. She also notes, as do others, the particular social stigma and discrimination suffered by those living with HIV/AIDS. To this I would add the discrimination suffered by those who, like Stewart, were exponentially affected by the stigma attendant when identified as a user of illicit drugs, and of having been housed within the corrections system (Jackson, 2002).
One last point: many drug-addicted Centre participants certainly had a difficult life due to their addictions and the problems associated with them. Still, modern HIV medicine was keeping them alive and relatively healthy to such a degree that many listed HIV as second, third or fourth among their major health concerns. Now that Stewart was in recovery from addiction and enjoying relatively stable health he was having to come to terms with HIV being his primary health concern. His grieving process was, in a sense, still current.

**Herman & Complex PTSD ~**

Judith Herman (1997) in *Trauma and Recovery* offers an additional definition to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), one that includes long-term, chronic stress of a traumatic nature. Specifically, Herman was thinking of long-term sexual and/or physical abuse often, though not always, experienced in childhood. Herman wished to differentiate these types of experiences from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychological Disorders (DSM)'s overarching definition of PTSD, which is based on "prototypes of combat, disaster and rape" (p. 119). That diagnosis, she insists, did not capture the experiences of those who have survived "prolonged, repeated trauma" (p. 119). In particular, a distinction had to be made between the two; she coined the term "Complex Trauma" to describe this condition.

The primary characteristics of all trauma, Herman (1997) says, are hyperarousal, or a persistent expectation of danger; intrusion, or the imprint on the person of the traumatic moment(s), and constriction, or the "numbing response of surrender" (p. 35). I witnessed the presence of all of these factors in my work at
the Centre. In particular, I believed that Stewart could be said to have lived with all three to varying degrees since his childhood.

I presented these concepts in conversation. As to hyperarousal, Stewart answered that as a child and young adult, he often thought that danger was around the corner: “Actually I really felt total chaos, but ‘danger around the corner,’ yeah.” As to intrusion, he did feel that visions of the events of his abuse were or had been ‘with him’ at all times: “Yeah, totally. But (what I did was) make it a better imprint. You work through the issues and now I’m getting some distance from it.” As to constriction, Stewart had lived with a number of factors in his life that could be said to be evidence of the response of ‘surrender’: “Yeah, I felt like I had no choices, like ‘this is all I know’.” This is discussed more fully later in this paper.

Herman’s (1997) criteria for Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are:

- A history of subjection to totalitarian control over a prolonged period. Examples include childhood physical or sexual abuse
- Alterations in affect regulation
- Alterations in consciousness, including reliving experiences
- Alterations in self-perception, including sense of helplessness or paralysis of initiative; shame, guilt and self-blame; sense of stigma
- Alterations in perception of perpetrator
- Alterations in relations with others including isolation and withdrawal, disruption in intimate relationships, repeated failures of self-protection
- Alterations in systems of meaning, including loss of sustaining faith, sense of hopelessness and despair.
Sucharov (2004, private communication) reminds that there is no continuum for trauma wherein any example can be quantified and assigned a role in a client’s disordered behaviours or thinking. Each individual has already assigned, to their body and brain, the ‘appropriate’ importance of the traumatic events. In Stewart’s case, discussion with him about his life had led me to conclude that, yes, he had certainly survived yet still lived with multiple traumatic elements. Not only his abuse as a boy, but all that had grown from those events, were active within his adult life today. His ‘self-perception’ had undergone upheaval to the extent that the self-described “inquisitive kid” one day identified instead as “a junkie” with “zero self-esteem.”

Stewart had experienced the ‘sense of helplessness’ that inhibits the trauma survivor’s initiative. In fact, he saw “no way out” of his new life path once it became established: sexual abuse, drug taking, crime to support drug use, the further abuses of the sex trade, and eventually prison. He had additionally lived with ‘shame, guilt and self-blame’ from his early years until only recently. His ‘sense of stigma’ as a “loser,” a “drug addict,” and an “ex-con,” led him to conclude, as do many others, that he deserved his unhappiness and no better. Consistent with Herman’s definition, he had also experienced isolation and withdrawal and numerous disruptions in intimate relationships.

Recovery

Herman’s (1997) stages of recovery follow. They should not, she asserts, be taken literally, and must be understood to overlap.

- establishing a healing relationship
- establishment of safety
• remembrance and mourning
• reconnection with ordinary life
• commonality of experience

In this study, what was required of me was that I determine what each traumatic element meant to Stewart. It was he who would decide which of his life factors were currently at play, how great was their influence, in what context he experienced them, and lastly what he believed he could do in dealing with them today and in future.

A diagnosis of C/PTSD can lead to, among other difficulties, isolation, confusion and a separation from one’s society (1997). Such had indeed happened to Stewart. Our work began at a point in his recent recovery from drug use when he was testing the waters of re-joining a society to which he was mostly a stranger. A man, in some ways still very young, he had lived at the edge of ‘respectable’ society for most of his life. Our work towards his recovery proved to be, among other factors, an investigation into separation and disempowerment and finally one of creation of new connections, empowerment and reconnection.

However, to do so we needed to establish a place, a space, where we could conduct this work. It would require a physical, emotional and aesthetic space where Stewart could feel safe to explore his emotional life, and consider elements of the past, present and future in new ways.
Kenny’s “The Field of Play”

The Field of Play (Kenny 1989), a guide to music therapy theory and practice, describes the music therapy experience in terms of its essential elements. The primary elements are the aesthetic, the musical space and the field of play.

The First Element: The Aesthetic

In Kenny’s view, the aesthetic is the environment, the contained space, that is itself the “human person” (p. 75). It contains non-verbal cues, communicated through action and being, perceived intuitively. The aesthetic contains all of the factors that constitute the whole person: experiences, attitudes, intentions and values. Kenny asserts that a person, whether therapist or client, is “a complete and whole aesthetic” (p. 75). We express our very humanness through the aesthetic; it represents all that we employ in deciding for ourselves what is ‘beauty’.

Kenny writes, “As one moves toward beauty, one moves toward wholeness, or the fullest potential of what one can be in the world” (pp. 93-94). She asserts that beauty is inherent in human development. If music therapy is to be effective it will be so because the therapist has facilitated musical experiences for the client, and the ‘aesthetics’ of those experiences will also have partaken of this process.

The Second Element: The Musical Space

Kenny’s (1989) second primary element, the musical space, is a place of containment. She asserts that survival of trauma necessitates the creation of the
musical space, for one requires the intimacy, privacy and safety provided by this "home base" (p. 79). Recovery from trauma further requires that one "reorganise and reintegrate" (p. 79) oneself in a healthy environment after this disruption. In this musical space, therapist and client together are free to explore the possibilities of new beginnings in a musical form.

These 'possibilities' can also include new interpretations of the past and new guides for future behaviour. These thoughts of Kenny's are consistent with Herman's concept of 'safety', or the first stage of reconnection, discussed later, which ideally leads to reintegration back into society. Kenny's belief is that therapy takes place in the areas of overlap in musical creation between client and therapist. The successful work that Stewart and I enjoyed came about, I believe, due to our successful creation of just such a space.

The Third Element: The Field of Play

With safety established, Kenny maintains that the field of play is now active. The client is free to experiment, to "express, represent and communicate" (p. 82). Within the field of play, surprise and playfulness and joy can be explored to the fullest. The 'field of play' that Stewart and I created and then entered was an egalitarian space of mutual assistance, also of switching of roles by leader and follower, of mentor and student, though I was mindfully aware that I was chief initiator for the techniques explored and the songs created. Through song creation and emotional examination from within the 'field of play', we looked at the story of Stewart, at 'where' he wanted to be, and where he was now on that journey.
~ AUTOETHNOGRAPHY - WHO IS MORE WHOLE?

A common difficulty encountered when working with clients, especially abuse survivors, is a tendency, difficult to avoid, to consider them less than whole. By this action I mean that one has presumed that someone relatively undamaged (such as therapists, as many presume,) are further along in this movement toward wholeness. Of greater benefit and accuracy, it seemed to me, was the premise that each of us is a complete aesthetic, and that our movement toward wholeness involves reorganisation and reinterpretation of our constituent parts, those 'parts' being environment, experiences, desires, needs, etc. I took the above thoughts of Aigen's and Kenny's to mean that the client's aesthetic, as well as our own, is whole yet developing, possessing beauty both visible and in process of revelation, complete yet still moving toward wholeness.

I had elected to provide therapeutic assistance to an individual who had suffered for most of his life from neglect or abuse by others, both individuals and official bodies. Those bodies included the social structures that incarcerated Stewart, then ignored his potential and focused on his coping behaviours which they labelled 'criminal'. My assistance would have to be respectful of his damage and also of his strength and resilience. I would use or at least consider every element of knowledge that I had acquired thus far in my own life in order to explore his strengths and potential, to consider new roles and directions, and not incidentally to facilitate us enjoying ourselves.

~ AUTOETHNOGRAPHY - WHY MY EXPERIENCE?

It was impossible to analyse this work without considering my own experiences, biases, desires and hopes. (A tendency to place myself 'above'
Stewart in a 'wellness hierarchy,' as mentioned above, could not always be avoided. I refer to my attempts at 'levelling the playing field' in more detail in Chapter Four). I was mindful of the need to include my own experiences for this account to be authentic, valid, and true. And, as I discuss throughout this paper, consideration of my own experience took on new meaning during the writing phase of my study. My hope was to assist Stewart in his ongoing development as a newly healthy and productive individual attempting to live and think in new ways not restricted by his past. I was aware of the need to establish a safe space in which to conduct this work. Only through consideration of my background, influences, desires and biases could I hope to provide my co-participant with both an illuminating and a therapeutic experience.

As will be discussed later, my own experiences, which emerged so fully to my consciousness during the analysis of the data, provided me with both insight and alarm. Lastly, I needed to ensure that I did not inflict harm or discomfort and that I pursue only areas where he was comfortable.

The Question

It was therefore by various means, processes and theoretical viewpoints that a research question emerged from the work that Stewart and I engaged in. That question was:
COULD ENGAGEMENT IN THERAPEUTIC SONGWRITING ASSIST IN THE DISCOVERY AND REDISCOVERY OF STRENGTHS AND OTHER RESOURCES THAT COULD PROVIDE CLINICAL BENEFIT AND BE APPLIED TO ASPECTS OF DAILY LIVING TO SOMEONE IN LIFELONG RECOVERY FROM COMPLEX TRAUMA?

I had seen first-hand how, through structured use of music, a motif both novel and familiar, participants could find new ways of looking at old problems. I hoped that Stewart and I together could musically look at familiar situations and attitudes from a new perspective. I envisioned him, in future writing and examination of songs, moving forward to where eventually he could place himself squarely in the sound pictures that his songs painted, less fearful, with more awareness and confidence than before.
Chapter Four - Methodology

The therapeutic songwriting upon which Stewart and I collaborated, and the investigations and explorations this activity stimulated, are the central work components of this thesis. The approach used was essentially qualitative; I proceeded as an interested and involved observer/participant, eager to understand what I was witnessing, but aware, too, that understanding a phenomenon is dependent upon time, circumstance, interpretation and context (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, et al). I wanted to know how Stewart saw his life, as a youth, then as, a young man, now as an adult on the cusp of middle age, and on into the future. To do that as thoroughly as possible, I would have to look from as many vantage points as I could devise or imagine. In these ways I hoped that I would be able to reliably answer some basic questions: What did his early experiences mean to him today? Could negative, unhealthy components of his self-image be re-shaped to any degree by new experiences such as the songwriting we were about to embark upon?

This was in part a phenomenological investigation. Phenomenology being essentially interested in how participants experience their world. Aigen (in Wheeler, 1995) states: “It is the nature of this experience that is the object of ... study” (p. 291). It was Stewart’s interpretation of his past and present lived experience that I wanted to hear. I hoped to then be his companion as he
directed himself toward positive future experiences. Aigen notes that one can always expect "...an element of personal projection" (p. 292) in gathering such knowledge. I expected to be continually learning about the structures we both used to organise our environments. Seeing that Stewart was beginning to change elements of his life in what he thought were positive ways, I was hopeful that he would be open to further 're-organising' of other factors within his environment. This eventually proved true for him as well as for me; much of this paper's analysis and discussion describe my witnessing of Stewart's re-organisation and also moments when I needed to deal with issues generated by my own.

**Why Songwriting?**

As described in the introductory chapter, I had been a professional musician and songwriter for many years, and had much experience as a singer, a writer and an instrumentalist. When I knew that Stewart was interested in writing songs I was enthusiastic about collaborating with him and sharing my experience. I was naturally also eager to see what therapeutic benefit might come of our collaborations beyond the production of the songs themselves.

When I wrote music professionally I often examined material that I had written in the past whether recent, near or distant. As I did, I knew that I was looking at more than a professional catalogue of material. I could, in reviewing a past song, situate myself two, five or twelve years in the past, and see 'where I was' emotionally, spiritually, developmentally, psychologically, and in other ways, based on my recollections of what my life was like when the writing took place. I could, through the music *and what it evoked*, compare and contrast my life
now with then, test the accuracy of my emotional memory, assess my professional progress, look for common themes, sub-themes, theme development, etc.

I found that all songs could be useful in these ways if one chose so. Though I was engaging in such activities mostly for personal interest and secondarily as a means to personal growth, reflective questions always emerged. Was this newest group of songs very different from the last? Why did I think or not think so? Was I happy to continue on as before or should I move on to new territory? Why should or shouldn’t I? Even unfinished songs prompted questions. Was I avoiding finishing a certain type of song? Was there particular emotional resonance in those that I started but never got around to completing? What was the content of those I was reluctant to complete? Was I thinking about a particular subject too hard? What was ‘too hard’? The reader will see how even the questions had questions!

**Defining Therapeutic Songwriting**

I have used the term “therapeutic songwriting” throughout this paper, and have alluded to its objectives. This is perhaps the logical location for a definition of the term. I define therapeutic songwriting as: “the intentional co-creation, by therapist and client, of original musical works comprised of the elements of music as chosen by the client in collaboration with the therapist, and lyric content supplied by the client. The therapist presents additions and suggestions to edit musical or lyrical content only when deemed necessary based on assessment of client intentions for the material. Some of the intended clinical benefits of therapeutic songwriting are: to establish and assert individuality,
provide a place of safety for emotional investigation, define emotional life, metaphorically depict one’s experience, to establish rapport with another, and to enjoy a new experience.”

The Pilot Study

I will briefly describe the pilot study that formed the basis of the work with Stewart. The original study included ten participants at the Centre and two staff members, including myself. Stewart was a participant in the original study, and the methods I describe here pertain to all participants in the project, though this paper focuses only on his contributions.

Selection of Participants

All participants at the Centre were informed of the study by means of weekly community meetings, by word of mouth, and by dissemination of the information by other staff. This method of preparation lasted four weeks. When I had achieved the desired number of subjects (initially ten participants and two staff; one participant died before completion of the study) I began scheduling the sessions. I conducted individual interviews, and asked further questions as follow-ups to the subject matter elicited in the primary interviews. The interviews focused on issues of illicit drug use, and on the musical experiences of participants. After the initial interview participants and myself wrote two songs together. In further sessions, participants and I looked at the musical and lyrical content of the songs as a means by which they could examine the emotional content of their created material.
Research sessions during that study were in essence no different from music therapy sessions that I conducted daily at the Centre. I arranged with participants to meet at a certain time for songwriting, and this time I explained to them that I was conducting a research study into songwriting with persons who had illicit drug histories who were living with HIV/AIDS. When I narrowed my gaze to one participant, Stewart, I was afforded the opportunity to investigate in greater depth his experiences with our therapeutic songwriting and my own experiences when working with a particular individual.

The pilot study was concluded part way through Stewart's and my work together. The data have not been described or discussed yet at time of writing. Some of the preliminary findings, however, are presented here as illuminating points for this study.

Methods

Stewart & Music at the Centre

Prior to writing with Stewart I was already co-writing songs with other Centre participants. I had professional experience with the process and was comfortable with engaging participants in this activity. Many were amateur musicians while others were active in writing poetry and lyrics. Some even had professional training and experience. I was learning how to apply this activity in a clinically useful manner when Stewart and I met.

The first time I saw him Stewart was in the music room of the Centre, playing an electric guitar and wearing a long winter coat and dark sunglasses. When we were introduced he greeted me with a few mumbled words, little
expression and without removing his sunglasses. I explained who I was (then a music therapy student) and we had a conversation about his musical preferences which were post war American rock and roll, country and blues, especially from the 1970’s onwards. After one or two weeks we began playing our guitars together and finally at my suggestion began writing songs.

The Music Room

For our music therapy sessions, we met in the Centre’s music room, a space about 12 x 22 feet with an 8-foot high ceiling. It was equipped with an electric piano, organ, acoustic guitars, stereo, numerous percussion instruments, electric six-string guitar, electric bass guitar, amplifiers for the electric guitars, and was carpeted. The room had been colourfully painted years before by staff with the help of participants and was described by most who used it as warm, somewhat homely and worn, and comfortable. When there, we put an “In Session” sign on the door, closed it and conducted sessions.

Beginning At the Beginning

I did not begin by initiating writing to Stewart, believing it best that we establish a relaxed musical relationship before suggesting a potentially intimidating activity. We began by my simply teaching him some blues guitar solo techniques, and then over several sessions gradually introduced him to the chord structures and some solo styles common to the blues.

Stewart came to our initial sessions with a bit less anxiety around playing the guitar than some participants due to his having been an amateur musician. Acoustic guitars were commonly found in jails, he said, except in areas where it
was feared they might be used as weapons. During his times in prison he had learned some guitar basics: six or seven chords, though not always aware of their names, some parts to one or two well-known rock solos, and several songs. Stewart was sometimes unsure of the correct use of such terms as octave, harmony, chord, scale, etc., often substituting one for another.

Rather than demonstrating blues techniques to Stewart on paper, I informed him that the musicians whom he most admired had learned music as I had, by ear. Most of them, with the exceptions of many of the keyboard players, had little or no formal training and did not read music. Stewart expressed relief at this; he had been concerned that he might have to learn to read music to improve and that reading would prove too difficult for him. To demonstrate blues solo patterns, I elected to show him the 'shapes' that certain solos made on the fret board, and encouraged him to memorise the shapes rather than the notes. Most soloists, I told him, don't know the notes by name, they become accustomed to understand at any moment where they are *within the scale* of the key in which they are playing. One could say they are at the top or at the bottom (the same note one octave lower) of that scale, and descending or ascending into the next octave, and now they are playing the 7th of the scale, now the 5th, etc.

Using the same low threshold techniques we then moved on to other genres he admired such as country music and rock and roll. Then, after meeting twice a week for a few weeks, we began writing.
Can I do this?

Stewart, as I note, was of the opinion that he would not be able to write a song because he had never yet been able to do so.

I tried and I couldn't do it. I didn't know how to start, or how to finish what I started.

Stewart held a long established view of himself as one who 'couldn't do it' and did not know where to find out how he could learn. The lack of ability that he so wanted to possess gathered strength over time to the point where he was eventually not only blocked and inhibited but also fearful:

It's like every day I've got writer's block. I'm just scared to write. I think a lot of it's just fear around writing, scared to be a bad writer. It scares me.

Through songwriting I hoped to assist Stewart to grow comfortable with the concepts of control, self-efficacy and agency in his deliberate actions. From what he had told me, each of these was an area of difficulty for him. His attention would sometimes fail him during an arduous task, he generally felt himself to be limited in skills, and his low motivation was, I thought, compounded by his perceived lack of options.

I believed that the ideal toward which we should strive would be to write songs that he felt defined his feelings, emotions, moods, positions in the world,
etc., and that the writing of the songs themselves would be our immediate objective. I would then encourage him to examine the songs he wrote. We would determine what he felt they evoked, what emotions they triggered, what guides they could be, and what potential companions they could be for him in his life’s journey. He could decide at any point if he wanted others to hear them.

I offered assurance that we could start very simply, that a song could be as simple as three notes and one chord, also that one need never allow others to hear their work. I demonstrated some very well known songs with minimal chord changes and simple melodies. "Helpless" by Neil Young, for example, had only three chords and three notes in its melody and yet conveyed a world of emotion. "Knockin' On Heaven's Door" by Bob Dylan had only one more chord than "Helpless" and a four-note melody. "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" had six notes and only one chord.

"I've Got A Right To Sing The Blues" (Koehler & Arlen) - Where Is My Voice?

I hoped that a side benefit to our study would be that Stewart would sing, as he hoped to do. I offered him some encouragement that I discovered worked well in putting people at ease. Knowing his familiarity with 60's and 70's rock musicians, which I shared, I told him of an interview I had read years before by a writer who had interviewed producer and singer Leon Russell in a recording studio. Seeing Russell turn up the volume of his own voice on a recording until it was very prominent, Russell informed the writer that "When you sing as bad as I do, turn it up really loud or people will think you're trying to hide something. That way, they think you intend to sound the way you do." Another story I
shared with Stewart was derived from an interview I had read as a teenager, with guitarist Jimi Hendrix. Hendrix declared that he had never considered being a singer until he heard “Like A Rolling Stone” by Bob Dylan. After that, he said, he was convinced that “If he could do it then I could do it, too.”

My intentions in sharing these stories with Stewart went beyond bringing humour into the room, strengthening our therapeutic alliance and rapport building. I hoped that in doing so I could help to narrow the distance that he felt existed between him and the musicians he admired. I also sensed that he held me in some regard for having been a professional musician. I was mindful of the dangers of nurturing unrealistic goals; I had worked with participants who spoke of entering the music business based on the strength of recording one song with me. I was nonetheless confident that there was value in his seeing the ‘common ground’ he shared with others whom he admired. I describe some results of this endeavour in the Discussion chapter.

**Interview Schedules**

The interview schedule was designed to illustrate Stewart’s relationship with illicit drug use, his feelings of being an ‘outsider’ to society, his relationship to music throughout his life and what he hoped he might gain from participation in this study. Based on his responses in the interview schedule, I developed probing and illustrative questions that I administered over various sessions, sometimes during songwriting sessions. The probing questions sought in depth detail regarding Stewart’s feelings about his changing self-image, his emerging life as a non-drug using person, a partner, a friend, a contributor to society, and a creative individual who now considered himself a musician and songwriter. We
looked at the role that he believed therapeutic songwriting played in that ongoing transformation.

Field Notes and Triangulation

I employed the technique of ‘triangulation’ in order to flesh out and confirm the data I accumulated about Stewart. Following the interview sessions, I kept field notes on my experiences. Likewise, after songwriting sessions, I wrote notes about my experiences of that day’s activity. I refer to these notes throughout this and the following chapters. Stewart’s wife, Lori, also a Centre participant, was a willing source of verification, as were other staff familiar who knew Stewart. I also used Debbie, the music therapy intern who acted as my research assistant in the pilot study, both as assistant during the first interview and as a corroborating source of information since she also worked with Stewart.

“Stewart’s Story”

As detailed in the Methodology chapter, I found it not helpful, and potentially detrimental, to attempt to investigate Stewart’s sexual abuse history in the pilot study. The information that I have gathered from this period in his life comes from conversations that occurred at other times, and comments that arose within the context other discussions. Several quotes have their origin in an interview that Stewart did with a member of the Centre’s Foundation prior to my working there. With his permission, I include them here.
- The Songs

~ AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

I will offer a few words regarding my making suggestions during songwriting and Stewart often taking them. I again note that Stewart held my extensive professional musical experience in a high regard. I appreciated that acknowledgement and yet was mindful that I wanted him, in this study, to make as many of the choices as possible. I was concerned that he might too easily defer to my suggestions as I had sometimes seen other co-writers do. In summary, I concluded that in most of these instances I was generally satisfied I had made suggestions that worked, professionally speaking, and which pleased him.

He had, as noted, expressed a desire to become “more professional.” My task had then become more complex, one of balancing his wishes with my goals of encouraging choice yet not promoting unrealistic expectation. In the end I satisfied myself that the balance I struck was as mindful and respectful as possible. I additionally did not refuse his acknowledgement of my greater experience, a basis for many of my suggestions with Stewart. ~

The Words

Once our arranged writing sessions were underway, I introduced the themes for the songs’ subject matter. I offered the choice, in the case of song No. 1, of re-writing the original songwriter’s work or writing original music. In song No. 2, I intended that we write original music as well as lyrics. I then wrote
down Stewart's verbalised thoughts as they came, and then helped him to shape them metrically, to his satisfaction, into the musical structure we had established. Afterwards, I assisted in genre, tempo chord and melody selection when he requested that I do so, or when it seemed obvious that he was stuck.

In this section I describe the methods I typically used with participants for melody creation and chord structure selection. I feel the topic is of sufficient interest to me and possibly to others that a more comprehensive description of that technique may in future be warranted. I additionally helped Stewart to decide when a song was 'done'.

I found that O'Callaghan (1996) in her Song Writing Paradigm, with which I was not familiar when I first began therapeutic songwriting, had used many similar songwriting techniques in her own work. Because of their remarkable similarity to my own process, I review them here. I later describe my own additions and subtractions to her points:
1. Song writing is offered a client if it seems appropriate.
2. A topic is chosen, or suggested.
3. Brainstorming on the chosen topic.
4. Ideas that emerge are grouped into themes by the therapist.
5. Choice of key is offered: major or minor.
6. Rhythm is decided upon using techniques derived from client’s speech patterns while verbalizing the lyrics.
7. Preferred mood styles are ascertained.
8. Melodic contours are suggested by client for each lyrical line, after being given a choice of two melodic fragments for each line of the song.
9. Client chooses accompaniment, dynamics, tempo, instrumentation and voicing.
10. Client is invited to name the song
11. The song is written out and then, if possible, recorded.

**What Will We Write? – Presentation of Topics**

For the pilot study participants, including Stewart, I offered two different themes, one for each song, with which to initiate lyric construction. They were:

- For song No. 1, I presented John Lennon’s song “Imagine” and sang it to, or with, each participant. Stewart was familiar with it; I merely reviewed the song’s lyric themes with him. I then asked, using that song’s lyrics as inspiration, what ideas would they like to encourage others to ‘imagine’ into existence that they feel do not exist now? This song (No. 1) became, in Stewart’s case, “If People Came Together As One.”

- For song No. 2, I asked: “If you consider all the factors in your life that you have identified as having kept you separated from society or ‘normal life’ (I listed abuse, drug use, prison and HIV), what would you like the world to know about you that you feel they should know but don’t know?” This song became, in Stewart’s case, “I Am Your Son.”
Some notes on the rationale for the suggested topics: mindful of the trepidation with which some participants entered the creative world, my feeling was that, by introducing the “Imagine” theme, Stewart and I could create an environment, a playing field, of safety. In this field, he could test the waters of imagining the future, considering new possibilities, and contemplating change. Then, from the strong position of having already written one song, I believed it might be safe to introduce, in song No. 2, the element of creating both original music and lyrics. The link between No. 1 and No. 2 would parallel the experience of increasing safety to provide a foundation upon which Stewart would feel free to write his ‘message to the world’. No. 2 was intended to be a place from which Stewart could anonymously describe and introduce himself to those whom he felt did not understand his experiences. Through creation and examination of these songs, Stewart would be afforded the opportunity to look at his experiences through a new lens, one that revealed strengths not deficits, possibilities instead of limitations, and hopefulness instead of discouragement.

Stewart’s verbalised thoughts for song No. 1, the “Imagine” theme, follow:
"Need to see the beauty of the world"
"People should come together"
"People should get what they need"
"Can't you see the world as it is?"
"Why is there so much war?"
"They think it's the way to go"
"I see us in the future, enjoying the world"
"Mountains, the sun, the beautiful blue sky"

As with the first song, for No. 2 Stewart and I were again seated in the music room. One week had passed. I presented the topic: “If you could write a letter to the world to tell people who don’t know anything about you about some of the things we have discussed, what would you like to say?” I then reviewed the subjects of abuse, drug use, prison experiences, HIV status, and feeling outside of ordinary society. I again wrote down his verbalised thoughts, and later we organised them into lyrics and finally a song. The music, incidentally, was added after some time had passed. I describe later the results of that passage of time.

Following are Stewart’s verbalised thoughts for song No. 2.
"People don't know me, they think they do"
"They see what they want to see"
"People shouldn't judge"
"It started when I was a little boy"
"Things happened that shouldn't have"
"You should read the book and not just the cover"
"I could be your son"
"I've made some mistakes, everyone does"
"We should try to live together for another day"

Turning Thoughts Into Pre-Lyrics – Organising No. 1

We informally sorted Stewart’s thoughts for No. 1 according to similarity of feeling or tone, established the existence of related themes then grouped the thoughts within those themes:

- encouraging others to see the beauty of the world
- reminding himself of the good things in his life
- expressing frustration at the violence in society.

To me, the phrase “Why is there so much war?” stood out. I saw it as a summary observation of the kind I might have made during a professional songwriting session. A question rather than a declarative statement, it represented a shift in ‘tone’ from the positive and encouraging ‘beauty’ and ‘good things in life’ towards the ruminative and almost impatient interrogative phrase that seemed to demand an answer. I suggested that we make it the chorus
or part of the chorus, or use it as the 'hook,' a catch phrase that could be a repeated motif. He agreed. I asked Stewart if he saw some consistently expressed emotion or feeling coming from 'the writer.' He replied, "He seems to be wanting people to look at things differently." I noted that I also saw this and that I also felt that the singer was feeling some impatience with people. Stewart said that he could "see some of that, too." I felt that this was a bit of a surprise to him.

**Turning Thoughts Into Pre-Lyrics ~ Organising No. 2**

For song No. 2 we performed the same 'pre-lyrics' procedure, sorting Stewart's thoughts into these themes:

- admonishment that others not judge him
- plea for understanding
- desire to express commonality
- desire to have his story told, and heard by others.

I felt that Stewart's lyrical thoughts in No. 2 were quite consistent in tone. Neither self-pitying nor cloying, they engaged the listener and encouraged changes in their ways of looking at Stewart and, I presumed, others in his situation. With some organisation of the ideas one could see a gradual shift in tone from general observation ("People see me ", "[they] seem to") to the more personal ("Oh, what you do not know", "I am your son"). With Stewart's agreement we approached the lyric organisation in terms of those themes.

With themes established, Stewart now selected how he wanted to elaborate them. We added a few more thoughts to his original ones. We then
began the musical task of transforming the pre-lyrics into finalised ones. (This process, the introduction of various musical elements, is described later in this chapter). I suggested that the song was made more powerful by saving “I am an addict, I am your son” for the first line of the chorus because of its strong emotional resonance, particularly after the more general thoughts that preceded it. Again my professional experience was guiding me. I did not want to overwhelm the process with my ideas but I sensed that Stewart would appreciate this use of my experience. He agreed to my suggestion for lyric organisation.

The Music

Recall that Stewart had expressed wanting to be a singer. He considered it something of a secondary skill next to writing and playing the guitar, his true passions, but he definitely hoped to be able to improve his singing to the point where he would be comfortable performing in public.

To facilitate his singing, I employed a variety of techniques over time, some specific to vocalising and others with the aim of reducing his anxiety about the process. I am not a vocal coach but this may have been an advantage to us. Having been a professional singer for many years, I could offer to him the reassurance that, in the rock and roll, blues and rhythm and blues world that I knew and which he wanted to join, individuality had always been a prized attribute. One need not have vocal training, a technically ‘good’ voice or even be mindful of existing standards to assert one’s ‘right’ to declare oneself a singer. Considering that singers as disparate as Neil Young, Alanis Morissette, Queen Latifah, B. B. King and Lou Reed were admired by millions, I could assure Stewart that his ‘voice’ was his own and did not need to change to be valid.
However, if he wanted it to be even better than it was now (more expressive, able to last longer in performance) then practice would do a great deal for that and writing a song involved singing it many times.

*Melody Creation (*& Incidentally Singing*)

The following description details the methods by which I typically assist participants in developing melodies and that I used with Stewart. I describe it as being 'incidentally' useful in facilitating singing by taking the participant's mind off of their voice, almost always a source of self-consciousness. I followed these steps to completion of each song in turn.

After reminding him that we had control over all aspects of this process, I asked Stewart to speak the lyrics. I did not read along with him or accompany him on any instrument. When he had gone through the song twice, I asked him to read again. This time I accompanied by tapping my hands on my knees. With a tempo and rhythm established, I asked him to again speak rhythmically, this time allowing his voice to rise and fall naturally in pitch and emphasis (Stewart's speaking voice was normally a soft and relatively low baritone, with moderate variance in pitch). He did so and it took only one or two run-throughs to note some developing inflection. I mentioned this to him: "It's getting more musical; I can hear it." "It's starting to sound like the song is coming out." While speaking I did not stop the rhythm so that the emerging musicality would not be interrupted.

I next encouraged Stewart to speak/sing the words louder, as if he were trying to be heard by someone across the room. Now I held a guitar, or sat at the
piano, and when I detected a consistency in terms of vocal pitch, I located the
tonal centre on the lowest string of the guitar (low E) or in the lower octaves of
the piano typically two octaves below middle C.

(After running through the song once or twice in this fashion, the singer’s
voice will sometimes rise in pitch and volume as their vocal chords warm up
with use and she/he becomes more comfortable with singing. At this point I
begin to sense that the participant has passed through the ‘window’ between
speaking and singing and that brain activity corresponding to singing has now
become dominant).

With a potential tonal centre, and therefore a key, established, I then told
Stewart of any melodic activity I was noticing. I brought phrases to his attention
if I heard a motif of several repeated notes, or if I heard a phrase that I thought
contained some melodic structure of interest, because I felt it was original or
otherwise interesting.

Reminding him that melodies need not be complex to be memorable or
interesting, I then suggested variations on the selected phrase or phrases. A verse
that featured essentially descending pitches could be set apart by a chorus that
had some melodic ascension. If the verses had long notes, for example each note
held for two beats, a chorus with shorter, quarter notes could distinguish it. And
I tried to always offer the option of making verse and chorus identical.

At any point during the musical development of the song, we typically
continued to shape the lyrics with each run-through, adding and subtracting
words to suit the song’s metre (numerical organisation). For example, “We are all
as one," was clumsy given the space available to it, so our changing it to "we are as one" was logical, easy and did not place awkward emphasis on any syllable. Sometimes entire lines were dropped if they were not needed. At the end of "If People Came Together As One," as an example, Stewart saw that we technically needed two more lines to complete the last verse yet he still thought the song’s intentions were complete. I reminded him that repetition was a hallmark of the pop song, indeed in all of music making. We could simply take two of his favourite lines from earlier in the lyrics and repeat them. I shared with him some of the many examples of repetition and he chose to use "The beauty of the oceans, runs so deep, it leads me to the highest mountain peak" once more.

When we arrived at the last verse of "I Am Your Son," I had a sudden thought that the words might have greater impact if they were spoken. The emotion that I saw in "We are the same, we are as one," and "Please remember what I’m trying to say...we should try to love for just another day" was unmistakable. They seemed to have a polemic quality that speaking or rapping could set them apart to conclude the song to great effect. Stewart agreed to try it, itself admirable because he was definitely not a listener of rap or hip-hop music.

With the lyrics mostly set, our task became to then build on the emerging musical elements and decide upon suitable chords, dynamics and arrangement (that is, deciding the order of verses and choruses, a solo if Stewart wanted one, also how to end, etc.).
Musical Shaping

I introduced one or two chord changes while Stewart continued singing. When I detected melodic movement I changed chords modestly, usually to a IV or a V chord (in C Major these are F Major or G Dominant 7th), or began a simple downward bass movement.

No. 1 – For “If People Came Together As One” I was at the piano. I began the chord changes using a descending bass line beginning with G Major descending to D Major with F#. in the bass, then to E minor, adding an Em 7th to continue the downward movement, then a C Major. This chord pattern is very well used in rock and roll and pop music but still leaves considerable room for original melodic expression within its format. I added a D Dom 7th in order to return to the tonal centre of G Major. I arranged to arrive at G Major at ‘completion’ points such as the end of a verse or at partial completion points such as the end of the second line of a four line verse. I moved to a C Major for the chorus.

No. 2 - In the case of “I Am Your Son”, I chose the guitar. This was likely less of a consideration for Stewart than for me. I sensed that the newness of the songwriting experience had not yet made him crave novelty. Already familiar with major and minor chords and the differences in their emotional shading, Stewart chose to begin in a minor key. When we were well into the speaking/singing exercise, I initiated some chordal movement that corresponded with the notes I was hearing coming from him. I moved from the D minor to G Major. Partway through the two bars that I had mentally allotted that chord I changed it to G minor to make the transition back to the ‘colour’ of the original
D minor easier. Stewart reported that he liked this very much. He sang through to the end of the first verse where I continued to hold the D minor chord. While strumming, I told Stewart of an effective transition technique for moving from verse to chorus that could highlight the change in mood from sombre to strong that I saw in “Son’s” verses and chorus. This would be changing from the minor key to a major one. Stewart expressed enthusiasm at this suggestion when he heard it. F Major is a natural choice for such a function in the key of D minor and this is what I played. Taking advantage of the strength inherent in the sound of the F Major, I then suggested holding the first note of the first line (the word “I” in the line “I am an addict”) then repeating the technique for the second line to give emphasis to the first (the word “I” again, from the line “I come before you asking love”). I suggested a return to the minor for the remainder of the chorus, in this case A minor, then added D minor and Bb to round out the chord selection for the chorus. Each of us sang through the lyrics with the new chords until we mutually came upon a melody that brought us back to the tonal centre of D minor.

What Time Is It? ~ Tempo

For No. 1, choice of tempo was accomplished quickly; Stewart’s recitation of his lyrics before the music was added seemed to give him a natural tempo that he wanted to maintain. When asked, he also maintained that it “doesn’t sound like it should be a loud fast rock song.” He did, however, think that it should be “strong sounding.” I suggested we keep it mid tempo and add some strength and urgency in the chorus through simple performance dynamics.
For No. 2, Stewart had settled on a minor key (D minor) very quickly. Choice of a minor key often leads a writer to the slower side of the tempo pendulum. Stewart early settled into a groove slower than No. 1’s, declaring that it “sounds like a slower song.”

*Are We Swinging Yet? ~ Rhythm*

Something of a cousin to tempo, rhythm can sometimes be easily established by the same means, that is, the writer verbalising their lyrics until they feel comfortable with the phrasing. Once we introduced music to each song, it quickly became apparent whether the rhythm and tempo were forming a bond, and each was easily adjusted until they seemed to ‘match’. For No. 1, Stewart had already decided that it was to be a mid tempo rock song. I suggested 4/4 time with accents on the first and third beats for the verses, then, to highlight the urgency of “Why is there so much war?” changed instinctively to four strong beats per bar. We both thought the rhythm and emphasis change fit well with the lyrics.

For No. 2, acting on Stewart’s suggestion that it be slower than No. 1, I strummed a D minor chord with little emphasis, hoping his vocalising would suggest some emphasis. When some emphasis did itself I placed a stronger beat on the second and fourth beats of the bars. Later, I hoped Stewart would be amenable to the use of some hip hop-style rhythms for this song and suggested so. I then put the guitar away and tapped on my knees and he vocalised along with it until he said he felt comfortable. I note that hip hop and rap rhythms, while familiar to us both, were not in either of our playing repertoires, though I was familiar as a listener with several artists of those genres.
What Do We Call It?

I explained to Stewart some common methods of naming songs and added that, as usual, we were not bound by any rules. I shared with him techniques such as using the most often repeated phrase, usually found in the chorus (the Beatles' "She Loves You," Lou Reed's "Take A Walk On The Wild Side" or Bob Dylan's "Knockin' On Heaven's Door"). We could create a phrase that was not part of the lyrics but seemed to sum up the song (David Bowie's "Space Oddity" or "New York Mining Disaster" by the Bee Gees). Still another technique was to take a repeated phrase and parenthetically divide its most memorable part from the rest such as the Rolling Stones' "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," known universally as "Satisfaction."

Stewart suggested "Why Is There So Much War?" or "If People Came Together As One" for No. 1. I thought that the second of the two had a more poetic sound, and was less directive of the listener, leaving more room for interpretation. I shared with him that this was a consideration many professional songwriters would make. He replied that this sounded like the best choice. For No. 2 I asked if the lyrics suggested a title to him. Stewart replied that "I Am Your Son" stood out but that "Please Read The Book" seemed almost as appropriate. I said that I agreed. As we have seen, our final choice was "I Am Your Son." Because of the similar suitability of the two possibilities I informed Stewart of another title-writing technique. This was to put an alternate title parenthetically after the 'official' one. As examples I offered "Fly Me To The Moon (In Other Words)" by Sammy Cahn or "I Got You (I Feel Good)" by
James Brown. Ours could be “I Am Your Son (Please Read The Book).” Stewart made his decision after considering these possibilities.

Reflection on lyric content - “That’s How I Feel” (B. McGhee)

We spent by far the greatest amount of time in reflection upon Stewart’s lyrics, first as verbalised thoughts, then as potential lyrics, then as constituent parts of a new entity, the song. The music came to us very quickly; the recordings, too, were simply live performances, committed to disc after several rehearsals.

I wanted to know just how personal this enterprise was to him but I was mindful that to be intrusive into another’s emotional life was not advisable or responsible. I initiated reflection by asking if ‘the writer’ was obviously him or a composite figure, perhaps someone he wished existed, or did he know someone like this? Similar to White and Epston’s (1990) externalising conversations, I was offering Stewart the choice, through use of either first-person or third-person perspective, of deciding how much of himself he wished to reveal. From the first, Stewart declared that the singer in the lyrics was him, today and his earlier life.

As with other participants in therapeutic songwriting, I found I had opportunities at every turn to invite Stewart to elaborate on his songs and their elements. I describe here just a few examples of passages I selected for
exploration, and a brief summary of the results they evoked. I enquired, for instance, for elaboration on Stewart’s thoughts or feelings when I saw:

**Discrepancy in chronology amongst verses.**

At times we shuffled verses so that the ‘temporal movement’ be consistent with Stewart’s intentions. As an example, in “If People Came Together As One,” the last verse was originally second. Because I knew Stewart had high hopes for tomorrow I invited him to consider placing the verse beginning with “I see myself tomorrow, us together as one,” last because of its aura of hopefulness, and to offset the insistence and frustration of the chorus’ “Why is there so much war?” He agreed that the change made his intentions clearer and we edited it accordingly.

**Discrepancy between first, second or third party points of view**

Throughout the pilot study I observed discrepancies where a writer shifted tense. Sometimes this was due to inexperience with the writing process. Other times I theorised that the reason for this was discomfort with placing oneself in the vulnerable position of plainly stating personal viewpoints. Stewart was consistent in placing himself in the first person in his final lyrics; it was in his *pre-lyric* verbalisations where I spotted elements worth my suggesting that he elaborate. I therefore asked questions based on those pre-lyric verbalisations: “Is the writer really you? Tell me about others who, like you, might also feel this way. Can you say a bit about the ‘them’ you refer to? Are you one of ‘them?’ Describe an experience that shows me what the lyrics refer to.”
**Emotion words' or phrases**

Discussing Stewart’s emotional life occurred through deliberately unstructured means. Eager though I was to do so, I was still mindful of his many years of restricted expression. My method of initiating conversation was naturally via the songs we wrote. As I observed emotional themes emerge from his lyrics I made notes on which ones I thought we might look at in more depth, then presented them conversationally.

**The word “God” as used in No. 2**

I used the appearance of the word ‘God’ in No. 2 to investigate the role that spirituality played in Stewart’s life.

**The theme of violence found in No. 1**

I asked what violence meant to him, how he saw it, and what place it had in his life before and now. I was especially curious because he had lived many years in violent or potentially explosive environments such as street life and the prison system. I wished to know to what he attributed his own peaceful nature.

**The ‘beauty of this earth’ and ‘the highest mountain peak’**

I used these quotes to invite Stewart to reflect upon what he considered to be the qualities of his daily life that he was most grateful for. What, for example, were some things that spoke to him of the ‘beauty of this earth’? What did it mean to him that he could notice beauty when clearly so many could not? What did ‘the highest mountain peak’ represent?
Into The Future - “As the Years Go Passing By” (Albert King)

A few days following the afternoon that we completed “I Am Your Son”, we began a new song. Technically this would not be a part of our study but it could be another song to consider performing or recording. On this day, we had reflected upon the themes contained within “Son”: alienation, being judged, reconnecting with society, and others. Stewart then presented a new song idea called “Finding My Way.” He had the phrase and some elaborating thoughts.

We quickly did so. He sang the phrase. Metrically the lyrics “finding my” were 16\textsuperscript{th} notes landing on beats 13, 14 and 15 within a 4/4 time signature, while the word “way” landed on the 16\textsuperscript{th} beat of that first measure and tied to the first beat of the following one. Using his voice as a cue I found the key of B minor where “way” took us to E minor then we returned to B minor to repeat the phrase. It all happened within a minute and I expressed my excitement that we were writing a song whose lyric theme, title and music all stemmed from his inspiration. Stewart was excited as well. We completed “Finding My Way” in less than an hour and then recorded it for safety.

In the Discussion chapter, we look at the significance of this song’s creation. We will look at how it pertained to our overall clinical relationship, at its role in Stewart’s continuing emotional investigation and lastly as it pointed the way metaphorically toward the future beyond our study.
Chapter Five - Analysis & Findings

I GUESS UNLESS YOU TRY IT YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO... AT FIRST IT WAS FEAR AND APPREHENSION THAT JEFF WAS GOING TO BE DOING ALL THE WRITING AND I WAS GOING TO BE DOING THE SITTING (LAUGHING).

I was unsure what to expect from exploring my objectives. I had a natural desire to find therapeutic benefit response to therapeutic songwriting. Personal experience led me to believe this would occur. Still, I had no certainty that Stewart and I would progress past the enjoyment stage of collaboration.

In this Analysis section, we will begin with Stewart at the beginning of the study. I will refer to the initial interview as well as to the follow up questions administered over many months. I will speak about the remove from ‘reality’ Stewart lived with for many years, then at his gradual re-entry into ‘typical society’ which coincided with his taking part in this study. We will look at the particular songwriting techniques I suggested, and the results of them. I include an examination of Stewart’s lyric ideas as they illustrated the themes that emerged, and then we look at the finalised lyrics and a description of how music was added to create a song. I describe our examination of the finished product, share Stewart’s comments on the meaning of his lyrics and what each completed
song meant to him. We discussed ways in which each song’s meanings could have application in his daily life; we also looked at how each song related to both the past and the future. Lastly we will see how an unexpected song, “Finding My Way,” helped to point the way to potential future writings and discussions.

I note changes in Stewart’s daily life that accompanied his songwriting activities and musical explorations. These changing elements included new roles he was beginning to assume for himself each of which was, I believe, a modern manifestation of dormant or obscured parts of himself that traumatic events early in his life had hidden or distorted.

~ AUTOETHNOGRAPHY - LEVELLING THE FIELD OF PLAY

Most of the study’s participants needed at least some reassurance that musical training was not required of them. Stewart was different because he had experience on the guitar and this was partly responsible for his somewhat fewer inhibitions. I found it helpful, however, to describe some basic ideas around research in order to assuage any anxiety that he may have had about laboratory settings, experimental work, graphs and charts, etc. In that regard I found Stewart to be rather more curious that concerned.

I have spoken of my desire to ‘level the playing field’ between Stewart and myself. I had witnessed the prospect of songwriting intimidating potential participants before and devised numerous ways of easing their minds about the exercise. With Stewart this proved somewhat less of a problem, as I have stated, because of his prior experiences with music.
As mentioned, early in this study I concluded that I had up to then taken my songwriting experience partly for granted. I felt it was relatively easy to write songs and that most people would find the exercise enjoyable and be eager to take part. While I discovered that most participants did have some eagerness to do so, I had underestimated the wonder and sense of accomplishment that every participant, to varying degrees, felt and expressed...

What's Stopping Me?

I saw in participants a sense of wonder and awe at having written a song. This became a familiar result of songwriting and Stewart was not an exception. Not only was the exercise, in his words, “self-satisfying”, but it provided something more:

**IT TAKES AWAY DEMONS THAT WOULD OTHERWISE BOTHER ME.**

What were some of those ‘demons’? Recall Stewart’s fears that he would not be able to write, or like what he produced: “...every day I’ve got writer’s block, I’m just scared to write...I think a lot of it it’s just fear around writing, scared to be a bad writer, and not be happy with what I’m putting out. It scares me.” In just four sentences, he had mentioned ‘fear’ or ‘scared’ four times. After our songs were completed and we had reflected on them at length, and had even moved on to writing others, I asked him: “Do you remember saying to me at one time that you were afraid to be a bad writer, and of what you might produce?” How do you feel about that now?” His reply was that this had “faded now... I’m a little more relaxed and not so hard on myself.” To what did he credit this
change in how he viewed his songwriting capabilities? Stewart replied: “Just doing it with you... doing it a lot and finishing songs. I’m less afraid to fail now.”

~ AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

I recall being a young musician about to perform for the first time. I could hardly believe that I would, in a moment, be performing in public. I accomplished it simply by doing it. It became easier each time, and was never as stressful as the first. I, too, had wanted to write songs but I, like Stewart, was over-concerned with the quality of what I wrote or co-wrote. The first few seemed to be merely rewritings of songs that I admired. The more original ones did not seem unique enough or exciting enough to present to the public. The ‘cure’ for me was simply, as Stewart would also find, “doing it a lot and finishing songs.” I shared this with him: “If we don’t like it, we don’t have to show it to anyone.” He laughed and replied, “Yeah, I guess not!” After a time I, too, had been less and less afraid to fail. I was confident that, in time, he also would be less so.

I was also aware of crucial differences in Stewart’s life and my own at the same age. I had had family and friends’ support on my side, some measure of self-confidence, and any sense of alienation I felt then was probably not dramatically different from that of most teenagers. Most tellingly, I did not feel an outsider within my own society, and had not experienced the level of separation from society that may come to those who, like Stewart, had survived chronic traumas.
Interviews And Follow-Up Questions

Unreality

From our interview and my follow up questions I developed a picture of the sense of self that Stewart had constructed over many years, and which he still lived with. I could see that he was struggling to ‘move on’ from that constructed self, that he intuitively sensed it would benefit him and yet he felt held back. This sense of self had much ‘training’ to overcome. For example, Stewart had been interested in being a musician for most of his life but felt that the turmoil of his abusive experiences, leading to drug addiction, had blocked his way to the point that:

...THE DRUGS GOT SO MUCH THAT I STARTED TO GET GRAND ILLUSIONS I'M GONNA BECOME SOME ROCK STAR (LAUGHS) ... EVENTUALLY THE DRUGS JUST KILLED ME AND I LOST ALL MY EQUIPMENT AND I LOST MY DRIVE FOR MUSIC FOR MANY YEARS.

Those who work with people addicted to street drugs typically hear how addiction overtook them until passions and interests eventually become subordinate to the desperate existence demanded by addiction. Such had been Stewart’s experience. Added to this was the developing sense of unreality about his chances of being a successful musician. This unreality was echoed in other realms as well. Relationships suffered from distortion: “All I cared about was having a good looking woman even if it never lasted. I didn’t think I was doing anything I had to change.” When incarcerated, Stewart had several times found
himself locked up for his own safety, high on cocaine, because he was convinced that the guards “were trying to kill me. No matter what they said I told them to back off ‘cause I was sure they were going to kill me.”

During his years of addiction, the unreality of Stewart’s thoughts was a thread running through everyday life. “I thought it increased my use of music. I thought that it put me on another level where I could create better. Cocaine has a tendency of doing that to you. You get such a euphoria you think you’re on top of the world whatever you’re doing you’re doing it ten times better that you usually do it.”

**Fade to Reality**

Where was this fearful person when we first met? At the beginning of the study, sobriety was a new experience. “Everything’s different. You have to start from scratch.” He was, though, beginning to be a musician again. He was already using active music making to enhance his positive moods (“when I’m feeling up”) and also ease the bad times (“when I’m feeling down”). Regardless of his mood, he always knew that “I can go and play”. He was discovering that music making could augment good experiences and offer something comforting to difficult ones. A new participant at the Centre, he was taking advantage of having a staff music therapist and numerous music therapy interns for music therapy and music education. He had resumed playing the guitar after many years, and now joined in jam sessions and impromptu musical get-togethers. These activities, listening to music and attempting to write songs were, according to him, his musical life. He described music making and the relationship with his wife as the “centre of my life”. 
Stewart reported that he took “a few chord lessons and a few song lessons” from a guard in “Juveniles” (youth corrections). Had he sought out the training? “I did, yeah. But that’s been one of the hard parts is to find people willing to take the time with the training.” I told Stewart that I, too, had received no training as I had not known anyone who liked the music I did and had pretty well learned it on my own. I eventually, after a few years, found others with similar tastes. Stewart maintained, “I think that’s where I was scared. I guess I didn’t know how to learn. I just wasn’t pressed to learn on my own, I guess. It was too difficult for me. I thought it (music) was really complicated.”

~ AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

For the first year of two of teaching myself the guitar I, too, found many elements of music complicated and difficult. Yet I recall that I possessed a measure of confidence that Stewart seemed not to have had access to. I had experienced others telling me that I was musical, had a good ear and was a quick learner. I additionally had the luxury of the leisure time that only a relatively happy adolescence can offer. I could practice the guitar for hours at a time safely in my room. Though I was in process of gradually dropping out of high school as Stewart did at a similar age (he at 15, me at 16) and subsequently experienced numerous difficulties I still had a feeling that my life would turn out well eventually. ~

Stewart had not felt safe enough to, or even capable of asking for help: “There was nowhere to turn.” He describes his self-worth during this time as “none. I thought I was nothing.” I was mindful that Stewart was on the street and wishing he was a musician at the same age when I was learning all about the
guitar, how songs were written, how chords fit together, how to sing and how to play music with other people.

**Songwriting Elements**

**Lyric Themes – Integration & Meaning**

My notes, memories and other data that pertain to discussing lyric themes in Stewart’s songs are voluminous, too much so to include in their entirety. I have instead selected some of his verbalised thoughts and other discussion fragments that specifically relate to and support the research question.

Recall Stewart’s verbalised thoughts for song No. 1:

*Figure 3 - Review Rough Sketches No. 1*

| Need to see the beauty of the world” |
| “People should come together”         |
| “People should get what they need”   |
| “Can’t you see the world as it is?”  |
| “Why is there so much war?”          |
| “They think it’s the way to go”       |
| “I see us in the future, enjoying the world” |
| “Mountains, the sun, the beautiful blue sky” |

My field notes show that expressing thoughts on this topic came easily to Stewart. It was clear to me that he was concentrating hard on the topic, and was not experiencing discomfort, agitation or frustration. He typically took a break part way through to have a cigarette. The entire brainstorming session lasted
almost an hour from presentation of topic to collection of ideas. I added no music at this point. In fact, neither of us was even holding an instrument. We conducted this exercise in the music room with, seated across from one another. The few times that he seemed to be stalled, I prompted him by reminding him of the topic: “Think of changes in the world that you would like others to imagine happening, things that you would like them to consider.”

Our first song follows:
If People Came Together As One -
Words by SW, music by SW & JH

If people came together as one
How the world would have so much fun
People would not be starving anymore
And children would eat

Imagine this world as it is
What a beautiful place it is to me
Can't you see?
The beauty of the oceans runs so blue so deep
It leads me to the highest peak

CHORUS
Why is there so much war?
People fighting in the street
 Thinking they're making ends meet
I know there's a better way

I see myself tomorrow and
Us together as one
Enjoying the beauty of this earth
And its circling sun

CHORUS
Selected lyrics from “If People Came Together As One” appear in the table below. In Figure 5, themes described in the first column are supported by lyric quotations in the Illustrations column:

**Figure 5 - Themes Illustrated Song No. 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES</th>
<th>ILLUSTRATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Noting, and despairing of, violence in the world</td>
<td>“why is there so much war?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“people fighting in the street”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The need for all to appreciate existing gifts, beauty of world</td>
<td>“what a beautiful place it is”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“the beauty of the oceans”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“enjoying the beauty of this earth and its circling sun”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Hope for a better world</td>
<td>“If people came together as one”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“people not be starving anymore”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“children would eat” (SW)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6 recalls Stewart’s verbalised thoughts for song No. 2:
Lyric ideas for No. 2 eventually became “I Am Your Son”. Within these thoughts I noted themes of: admonishing strangers to not be judgmental towards the writer, pleas for understanding, and a desire by the writer to tell his story and to know it is heard. We eventually fashioned Stewart’s thoughts for No. 2 into “I Am Your Son” which follows:
Figure 7 - No. 2 Complete: “I Am Your Son”

I Am Your Son -
Words by SW, music by SW & JH

People see me in a different light seem to read the cover not the book
And not understand what’s God’s real plan
Judgements without reading the book

This is me you do not know, how deep the pain really goes
Started when I was a little boy, not being able to see the joy
Oh what you do not know, please read the book

**CHORUS** - I am an addict I am your son I come before you asking love
I ask a judgement you not make, for this could be a big mistake

You might shun me, not understand, might throw me in a garbage can
Remember this could be your son, or anyone

We are the same we are as one, we come before God like everyone
Mistakes we may have made a few, I have never judged you
Please remember what I’m trying to say
Is that we should try to love for just another day

(CHORUS)
Some of the lyrics to "I Am Your Son" are shown in Figure 8 below. Themes represented in the first column are supported by lyric quotations in the Illustrations column:

**Figure 8 - Themes Illustrated Song No. 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES</th>
<th>ILLUSTRATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Admonishment to others that they not judge him | "read the cover not the book"  
"I ask a judgement you not make"  
"this could be your son"  
"I have never judged you"  
"we are the same" |
| 2. Plea that others understand him | "This is me you do not know"  
"you might not understand" |
| 3. Desire for commonality | "This could be your son, or anyone"  
"We are the same"  
"We are as one"  
"We come before God like everyone" |
| 4. Desire that his story be heard | "how deep the pain really goes"  
"please read the book" (SW) |
In the Methodology chapter the reader will remember I took the opportunity with Stewart to examine certain of the themes I saw emerging from his two songs, and to observe how those themes changed with time. A few findings from those discussions follow:

**Discrepancy in chronology amongst verses**

Recall that Stewart took my suggestion, in No. 1, to move the hopeful second verse to the third (last) position to better illustrate what I saw as his hopeful outlook on the future. I observed and recorded that Stewart made this decision voluntarily after consideration of my suggestion. He said he agreed he was generally a “hopeful” person and that he preferred to end the verses with that sentiment. We agreed, though, to revert to the insistent “Why is there so much war?” chorus for the song’s fadeout. These dominating emotions, hopefulness and frustration with lack of change, provided the song a strong end point.

**Discrepancy between first, second or third party points of view**

Unlike many participants, Stewart’s final lyrics were consistently first-person singular. Before No. 1’s lyrics were finalised, however, Stewart’s pre-lyric thoughts were not very specific or revealing of raw emotion. In that pre-lyric phase for No. 1, as we (for the first time) verbally gathered ideas based on his thoughts and beliefs, he offered general concepts such as in Figure 1: “need to see the beauty of the world; people should come together,” etc. At this point there appeared only one personal reflection, the relatively safe, “I see us tomorrow, together as one.” By No. 2 Stewart was clearly more comfortable expressing very personal feelings, for example, “People don’t know
me, they think they do; It started when I was a little boy; Things happened that shouldn’t have; I could be your son; I’ve made some mistakes, everyone has.”

‘Emotion words’ or phrases

It was interesting to observe Stewart’s desire to express his intentions as we focused on a particular lyric and yet see him search for the ‘correct’ words. Stewart had previously shared with me that “I sometimes worry about getting the right words.” This soon became an easier process for him and eventually he offered his thoughts quite unselfconsciously though I still observed him searching for words. It is true that we had firmly established our relationship by the time we began writing. I also feel that, by taking all his emotional expressions ‘in my stride,’ it eased the way for him, first to continue to do so, then to elaborate and finally to initiate.

Discussing self-expression, Stewart told me that “Sometimes I get away from the fact that I’m writing for myself and not for other people. That can stress you out.” I asked if he could see any parallels with this new attitude and his changing daily life. He answered, “I guess it’s the same thing, you live and be true to yourself. When I was young I was a real follower.”

The word “God” as used in No 2

We reviewed the use of ‘God’ in No. 1, specifically “God’s real plan.” What, I asked, did Stewart think of as God’s ‘real plan?’ He wasn’t sure, but he knew that he sometimes asked himself that question now but never did when he was younger, on the run and using drugs. “If I did, I don’t remember it” (laughter). “I’d be happy if I got through the day.” What was ‘God’ to him
today? “Whatever has the ring of truth and honesty to it. In writing, I’m writing from my heart. Writing from experience is more truthful.”

Violence

Represented in some songs, particularly in No. 1, were themes of despair at the violence in the world, a need to appreciate beauty, and a kind of utopian vision of the world coming together “as one.” Stewart detested violence, saying, “It sickens me.” He did not use it and had not done so even during incarceration, when violence was common. “I kept to myself,” he said, and he had been careful not to present himself as a threat to others. Today, though he had seen much violence in his life, “There’s very little confrontation in my life. For me to stay healthy I need a safe space around me. I don’t need that bad energy. It’s basically protecting my home and my peace of mind.”

Had he expressed these thoughts to another besides me? He replied that recently, in tandem with his recovery from drug use and freedom from jail, he had expressed thoughts such as these to his wife, Lori. Did he recall expressing these sentiments to anyone else? He believed that he had not: “Not really, maybe I said some things about violence and how I didn’t like it, but not like in the song.” He declared that expressing these feelings occurred “only since I cleaned up. I was on numb mode before that.”

The ‘beauty of this earth’

Stewart believed that few people appreciated the beauty of the world. What, I asked, spoke to him of that beauty? He replied, “We’re lucky to live here, in Canada, with so much green and countryside. So many people, too, have it.”
In the last verse that began with “I see myself tomorrow” followed by “us together as one” I asked who are ‘us’? He answered, “I guess I mean everybody, people in general, the whole universe really.” Stewart saw the future uniting of all people “as one” as the best the future could offer. Did he see this as meaning all people would be more alike, I asked? He replied that “No, people would be different as they are now” but that they would “get along.”

“We are as one” (Wilson) – Desire for Commonality

I additionally saw, in No. 2, a new type of emotional movement from Stewart, this time a desire that the world outside try to understand him. Not utopian at all, this song has the courage to admonish those in the world who do not understand him (“this could be your son, or anyone) even as he expresses his wish to be a part of that world (“we are the same, we are as one”). The writer tells the audience what he thinks they need to do: “Read the cover, not the book.” He advises politely that, “a judgement you not make.” He reminds them of the hardships they know nothing about (“How deep the pain really goes”) and wags his finger at those who have judged him: “I have never judged you.” From our beginning with Song No. 1 Stewart had progressed to writing a song with a wide range of emotions, stated clearly and boldly.

Lyric Themes – Unlocking Doors

Recall that some time passed before he and I added music to the thoughts of No. 2, though we had organised them into lyric lines. When presented with these lyrics months later, Stewart expressed surprise and delight: “Wow, did I do that? This is pretty good.” When we completed the music for No. 2 and it became
"I Am Your Son," Stewart laughed with satisfaction and joy. "This is really good." My notes recall that the music was written very quickly. Perhaps the ease with which we turned his almost-forgotten lyrics into a song delighted him.

Stewart declared that these sentiments were still valid, also that they surprised him. Which parts, I asked? He said the second verse, which pertained to his abuse as a boy. I asked why they surprised him? Because, he said, it "talks about that time. I forgot I said that much." He added that he was used to referring to 'that time' under the right conditions, such as to his wife Lori, but was surprised that it had come up in a song. He wanted to leave it in.

As usually happened this prompted a discussion, this time about separation from 'normal' society. Following are some thoughts from that discussion:

J: "I am curious about the point where you feel you 'left' normal society?"
S: "Very young."
J: "Was it during the period of your abuse?"
S: "Yeah, it was back then. I felt like I was different from everybody else."
J: "And others didn't understand you?"
S: "Right."
J: It was as though "Nobody else has the same experiences as me."
S: "Right, nobody."
J: "And years later you find out that many people have had experiences like yours, including most of the guys you were in jail with over the years."
S: "Oh, yeah, jail is full of them."
In our examination of this song, Stewart shared that traumatic abuse shaped a good part of his youthful identity. Feeling that his experiences were ‘different’ from others', initiating his separation from society, he further did not expect anyone else to understand him. (I note that, even in prison, where inmates were aware of the high percentage of abuse survivors among them, the feeling of being alone persisted). Later in life, when he learned that his experiences were common, the new knowledge still did not automatically translate into a new belief that he would be understood.

How did he feel about expressing such personal thoughts and feelings in a song? Stewart replied, “It’s like a freedom to say what I want...and that it will be heard. (Laughter) Because it will be heard!” Whether another person heard a recording of his song, or heard him sing it on the street, “it’ll be heard. By expressing it musically, it is totally different. It’s a freedom that brings an order to the thoughts.”

The Songs Continue

There then followed the writing of a new song, not intended to be part of the study but which I include because it spoke to a ‘reaching into the future’ quality I had hoped would be part of our work together. I briefly describe our method of writing this song and touch on the main points of our ensuing discussion.

This time Stewart initiated the songwriting. We began by discussing the topics of alienation and reconnection suggested by “I Am Your Son,” the last song completed. Stewart had decided the song’s title and had a phrasing idea for
the refrain 'Finding my way.' He also had written many lines illustrating that theme. We transferred his lyric ideas into workable lyrics with few changes except for phrasing. The completed lyrics follow:
I grew up on the streets
Trying to make ends meet
I am just a man, living,
Trying to get through another day
Finding my way, finding my way
Finding my way, finding my way

Nobody cares to help me
I was so young grew up in a hurry
And the streets seemed to say
They had won
And stopped me from
Finding my way, finding my way
Finding my way, finding my way

I have tried so hard to get out
But wherever I go black clouds seem to follow
Has the world gone mad all is lost and sad?
Is there any light for me?
Finding my way, finding my way
Finding my way, finding my way
With the song written, we then played it for almost ten minutes, adding
dynamics, singing the refrain for many bars, and returning to the beginning to
start again.

(This session saw us in a semi-public area of the Centre. While singing the
song we attracted another participant who entered the room, sat in a chair and
wordlessly added percussion to our song by tapping his knees with his hands.
When we ended, he expressed admiration for the song and volunteered to play a
drum as accompaniment if we ever recorded it. He then left).

Stewart and I then discussed the song's theme. He said that it was about
struggling toward happiness and wholeness. I noted that his past experiences
appeared in the song and looked formidable but did not seem to be dominant
because he was ultimately 'finding my way.' He replied that this was an
acknowledgement of the past without allowing it to overtake the present and
future.

Recall that Stewart had been reluctant to engage on this topic previously.
When we had spoken generally about such issues as abuse, the sex trade or living
on the street, I found his verbalisations brief, expressed in short bursts,
displaying essentially the same thoughts each time. This time the discussion was
more relaxed than ever. Most important, I believe his new comfort level
stemmed from the fact that he himself initiated the topic that became the song.
His song then gave further depth to the initiated topic. Each element became a
source of enrichment for the other. Further, the added elements of performing
the song at length until we were completely engaged, as well as unexpectedly
performing it for, then with, a third party added yet more layers to the experience.

I had used Stewart's verbal reflection as a foundation for further questions that could lead us to the 'next song.' That we may not actually get to writing 'the next song' was not as important as exploring how his thoughts and feelings had been 'unlocked' by the writing of the present song, then how examination of that song led to further verbal elaboration and then on to further musical plans.

The Unexpected

One of this study's outcomes could not have been predicted. That was the lyric content of song No. 2. Stewart's songs demonstrated many themes consistent with the other writers in the pilot study with the exception of a warning, in No. 2, about the dangers of drug use. Stewart's song did not say this. All but two participants featured this warning. Recall, too, that Stewart was one of only two participants who were in recovery from addiction. Seven of the eight remaining participants' songs did contain this warning. Following are some examples:

"You should know about cocaine, how different it is, how dangerous it is" and
"You need the proper statistics" (Bill)

"Are you going to do that for the rest of your life?" and
"There's so much help", "They need somebody to instill hope" (John)

"Walk gently", "Be careful of the people around the corners" (Trish)

"Everybody needs to keep their hands busy" "A high is a false belief" (Rick)

"Is it worth putting the needle in your vein?" and
"I've been there, it's nowhere (Lori)
The sample size of the pilot study (11) was not large enough to draw conclusions regarding the lyric content of certain individuals’ songs versus others’. Additionally, it is not within the scope of this paper to address significant differences in lyric themes of those in recovery versus those still in active addictions. I feel it would be beneficial to music therapists as well as to other practitioners if this investigation were undertaken.

New Experiences and Roles

(TODAY) I FIT IN JUST RIGHT. I TRY AND HELP WHEN I CAN. I ACTUALLY GO OUT OF MY WAY TO HELP IF I CAN. I TRY TO VOLUNTEER AND STUFF LIKE THAT. I THINK I CONTRIBUTE QUITE A LOT TO SOCIETY ACTUALLY.

One of the joys of this experience was the opportunity to witness the emerging transformation of Stewart from a tentative explorer into an increasingly confident community member. Only a few months away from prison and from his last stretch of drug addiction when we met, I witnessed many elements of Stewart’s personality emerge from the ‘shadows’ to take their place comfortably within his character.

Performing ~

Stewart had never performed music in front of other people before we began working together. At the commencement of the study, however, he had for many weeks been a contributor to weekly jam sessions in the Centre’s living
room. He was in fact the most consistent attendee, playing guitar and singing. One day I asked how he felt about street performing, or busking. He declared that he was quite sure he would enjoy it, and one day expressed the desire to begin if I would take part. He and I did, in fact, busk together many times after Centre hours of operation, sometimes with a third participant joining us. He continued to do so, sometimes with the third participant and other times on his own when I was not available.

Stewart also performed in the local Gay Pride Parade, on the Centre's float, the back of a flatbed truck. Stewart was not a gay man; his same sex experiences had been either a survival skill or through coercion. I was personally very gratified that he expressed having no qualms about possibly being seen as gay by some onlookers, and that his overall love of music and music making was his inspiration. I refer again to earlier thoughts regarding researcher bias; I am an active supporter of equality for same sex couples and individuals and Stewart was aware of that. If I had sensed he was hostile to this stance, it might have provided further emotional exploration possibilities for our songs. I was glad that he was not.

Stewart additionally expressed a desire to meet other musicians, to jam with but also to discuss forming a band with. I supplied what advice I thought I could accurately offer. He has, as of the completion of writing date for this paper, not taken advantage of this type of contact. At time of writing, he said, "I guess I'm a little unsure of what to expect. They could be way better than me." I offered that he might be anywhere on the continuum of experience depending on whom
he met, not only at the beginning. He agreed that “the only way” was to “give it a try.”

Engineer ~

Stewart had never before been at the controls when recording. When our study was well under way, he demonstrated initiative in purchasing recording gear to use at home. He told me, “I use it all the time”. I was soon made aware that he was becoming an accomplished home recording engineer by recordings he brought into the Centre for my review. Stewart subsequently volunteered to act as my co-engineer for other participants’ recording projects, to which I naturally agreed. He has since become the de facto in house co-engineer for these recordings, assisting participants living with every type of life situation to see their recording projects to conclusion.

Community Member ~

Stewart had long had the goal of “giving something to the community.” He was grateful to the Centre and its role in his recovery and re-entry into daily life. During our work together he and his wife became volunteers at a local AIDS service organisation, performing regular tasks there. I was not active in encouraging him to become a volunteer. I include this information in order to paint a well-rounded picture of his life, and to illustrate that many others were involved in his re-integration back into the community.

Family Member once more ~

Also during this period, Stewart had been in more regular contact with his family in Eastern Canada. He had been afraid to disclose his HIV+ status to them
for years but informed them at this time. He reported that his mother and siblings were shocked but supportive. He told me had wanted for years to have more contact with them, especially his mother. He wanted in particular to record his songs and send them to her to let her know that “I’m busy, doing things and being productive.” One of his sisters came to stay with him in their first visit in many years. His fears, he said, about contacting his family had been out of proportion to the reality.

Writer/Artist – “Finishing What I Start” ~

I DIDN’T USE TO THINK THAT I COULD EVEN FINISH A SONG. I USED TO THINK THAT YOU HAD TO BE REALLY GREAT TO WRITE A SONG THAT SOMEBODY ELSE WOULD WANT TO HEAR.

In discussions about songwriting Stewart declared that a reason why he found such satisfaction in completing his songs was because he was so unaccustomed to completing tasks: “I couldn’t finish what I started. I could start things but then lose interest. I realise now that I was afraid to finish them.” Recall his earlier statements expressing fear of failure: “...scared to write...fear around writing...scared to be a bad writer.”

With each song that we wrote together I witnessed less and less of the fear he spoke of, and at the time of writing he appeared as comfortable presenting new topics and singing his lyrics as he did tuning his guitar.
Common Ground ~

The 'levelling of the playing field' to which I have referred was, I feel, clinically beneficial. Mindful to not foster unrealistic expectations, I nonetheless felt free to encourage Stewart to take his place amongst the rock and blues musicians he admired. I reminded him he was somewhere on the continuum just as each of them was, just as everyone is. He was not at the end but certainly no longer at the beginning. Had he not noticed that just when he thought he was lacking in experience and knowledge and may as well give up, we would discuss it and find that he was much further along than he believed? Through discussions such as these Stewart learned this was true.
Chapter Six - Discussion

Stewart & Complex Trauma

Recall Herman's (1997) conditions for Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:

1. History of subjection to totalitarian control over a prolonged period. Examples include childhood sexual abuse.

2. Alterations in affect regulation

3. Alterations in consciousness, including reliving experiences

4. Alterations in self-perception, including sense of helplessness or paralysis of initiative; shame, guilt and self-blame; sense of stigma

5. Alterations in perception of perpetrator

6. Alterations in relations with others including isolation and withdrawal, disruption in intimate relationships, repeated failures of self-protection

7. Alterations in systems of meaning including loss of sustaining faith, sense of hopelessness and despair.

Though a formal diagnosis had never been made, I believed that Stewart lived with most of the above conditions of complex trauma. His early and prolonged abuse led to further abuse as a youth sex trade worker (1); he lived for many years with ruminative preoccupation of those events (3); he suffered much guilt and self-blame, only recently partially relieved, for events over which he
had no responsibility (4); he had experienced painful withdrawal and isolation from others, lived with disruption in personal relationships and often had failed to protect himself (6), and he had extensive experience with hopelessness and despair, as a child, as a youth, then as a drug addicted youth, young man and man in his 30's (7). Thus, from the outset of this study, before the initial interviews had even been conducted, I believed that Stewart was living with a form of Complex PTSD. I had concluded so from our many interactions, verbal and musical, that had provided me with information about his history.

"The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from other. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections" (Herman, p. 133).

Recall Herman’s (1997) points for recovery, which takes place in stages that may overlap. They are, she maintains, not to be taken too literally. Again, these are:

1. Establishing a healing relationship
2. Establishment of safety
3. Remembrance and mourning
4. Reconnection with ordinary life
5. Commonality of experience

Recall, too, Herman’s recovery stages as they relate to Kenny’s “Primary Fields” (1989). Trauma, the “break in natural and healthy development” (p. 79), insists that safety be established before healing can begin. Herman’s “Healing Relationship” meets Kenny’s “Aesthetic” and Kenny’s “Musical Space” is where
Herman’s ‘safety’ is established. Entry into the field is then achieved when one is “motivated to make the first ‘sound,’ a creative gesture, a risk...an intention to engage” (p. 79).

The goal is to re-enter the society from which one has been separated. I believe Stewart would agree that for him a basis for safety had been established, and relatively recently. He was out of jail ("I was sick of it..."), and determined to not return to it or drug use. He was in a happy relationship ("She is my dream woman...the centre of my life"), becoming a productive citizen ("I’ve always wished that my life could bring something positive for someone else,"), and on his way to becoming the musician he had always wanted to be ("It’s what I always wanted to do; I love that there’s so much to learn").

I guardedly conclude that Stewart had at least partly passed through a “Remembrance and Mourning” stage. "I’ve come to terms with it" and "I know now it was not so much my fault" are both comments he made. My hesitation to invite him to relive the abuse of his past likely means that this aspect of his recovery may never be fully revealed to me. I refer to Stewart’s and my unintended experience of regression (the visiting of past trauma) in a moment.

Establishing Connection

Fear

Recall that for persons living with C/PTSD, as well as many living with any level of certain types of abuse history, the matter of choice can seem daunting, intimidating and even paralysing. Here is a thought from Stewart, expressed earlier: “It’s like every day I’ve got writer’s block. I’m just scared to
write. I think a lot of it's just fear around writing, scared to be a bad writer, and not be happy with what I'm putting out. It scares me."

"Scared," "fear," "scared," and "scares" appear in just four sentences. Stewart clearly had lived for much of his life with a number of what could generally be called fears: fear of others, fear to initiate, fear of the future, rear to change, fear of mortality, and on and on. In order to move on from the restricting straitjacket of trauma, he first had had to find new ways of looking at the world and at himself. He needed to feel safe to consider new options, and then feel safe to explore those options. Clearly he had not felt safe to do so earlier in his life. Now, in songwriting sessions, when we had together established the "musical space" where the exploratory work in the "field of play" (1989) could happen, we found a place where choices could be made and explored in safety.

**Where Do I Fit?**

Stewart wondered where his music 'fit' into the broader musical world. I sensed early on that he thought of his own music as being a great distance from that of his heroes. During this study I pointed out to him that Bob Dylan, a writer whose work I admired, had written average material in addition to his greater work. In fact, my opinion was that each of the songs that Stewart and I had written together were better than Dylan's worst one, which technically put our material in the same sphere as his. This prompted much laughter and Stewart noted, "Then we're in the same ballpark, then!" Being in the 'same ballpark' as those whose work he loved could have had the feared effect of promoting unrealistic expectations instead of providing a more normalising lens through which to view Stewart's own work as well as another's. In the end, Stewart
proved himself a very level headed person in this regard, and the ‘balancing act’
that I allude to earlier in this paper was quite successful in supporting his long
‘reach’ into a world he was accustomed to believe was closed to him.

My Voice

Also recall an earlier story I told Stewart to help alleviate anxiety he might
feel about singing. My intentions in sharing such stories with Stewart went
beyond evoking humour, strengthening our therapeutic alliance and rapport
building. I hoped that, by doing so, it would help to narrow the distance that I
was sure he felt existed between him and the musicians he admired. While
mindful of the dangers of nurturing unrealistic goals, I was nonetheless
confident that there was value for him to be found in a discovery of, if it were to
be a discovery of, common ground with others that was previously unknown to
him.

Being in “the same ballpark” as someone whom he admired went, I
believe, a good distance towards intensifying Stewart’s feelings of belonging: at
the Centre, in the music room, in our sessions as my co-writer, in jam sessions, in
his relationship, busking in the street and volunteering in the community.

Flow in the Field of Play

Stewart and I enjoyed a many-faceted experience through our songwriting
experience. By this I mean that I feel we were able to engage many aspects of our
selves, or our aesthetics, in the process, namely our social, cognitive, emotional
and spiritual selves. I am reminded of Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) concept of flow,
whose points are reviewed here:
narrowing concentration until fully absorbed
performing at the upper edge of ability but with a sense of ease
unselfconsciousness
altered sense of time perception
a sense of reward to be found in the activity itself, apart from the final product.

Stewart's narrowing concentration was clearly a notable experience: "It's like hard work but you really get into it." He stated that he was characteristically "lazy a lot of the time," though he did admit that his self-perceived laziness was sometimes the result of being unsure of his own abilities. Often, he was not confident that he could meet the requirements of a new situation: "...just afraid to try something new." During songwriting, however, except for a smoker's need for periodic breaks, Stewart stayed with the task until completion. He did this each time we wrote, including songs written after conclusion of this study. His absorption was strong and his engagement considerable. Did he perform at the upper edge of his ability? Stewart believed that "It's pretty complete; I gave it everything I had." Except for the occasion when Stewart seemed compelled to attempt to address his abuse period I recall a remarkable unselfconsciousness to his efforts.

Recall Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) points about engaging in an enjoyable creative activity. Stewart believed that with assistance he could 'complete the task' of songwriting. The writing had 'clear goals' and I was available for 'immediate feedback.' Our efforts removed us from the 'worries and frustrations of everyday life.' I did my best to ensure that our activities offered 'a sense of
control over his actions.’ Though focus on himself (and myself) disappeared, Stewart’s ‘sense of self emerged stronger.’ Lastly, as with any absorbing activity where one’s mind and body are maximally engaged, our ‘sense of time altered.’

We conducted our activities in the “reassuring” field of play (Kenny, 1989, p. 72). Verbal and non-verbal communications alike allowed us to enter that field. The aesthetic that was each of us, and expressions of beauty and of our “human condition” (p. 77) allowed me to “honour and notice” (p. 77) Stewart’s place in the field, and to encourage him to enter the “open and expanding” field (p. 77). In expressing himself creatively Stewart brought his aesthetic alive. The musical space in which we found ourselves was a safe home base from which we departed in order to experience elements of his long ago traumas in new and safe ways. Reorganisation of troubled memory and rote response, and the new experience of making music that he took pride and pleasure in, helped pave the way for Stewart’s reintegration into ordinary life. He clearly found rewards in the act of songwriting, enjoying both the processes and his role as co-writer and equal partner, and contributing to a greater whole that far exceeded its constituent parts.

Cordobés

Cordobés work with HIV + adults living with depression finds parallels here. She concludes that her statistical analysis did not support her hypothesis (that group songwriting would significantly increase group cohesion). She nonetheless feels it important that content analysis of the songs revealed high levels of “emotion words,” suggesting that songwriting promoted the use of
"coherent language, multiple perspectives, insights...and emotional reaction" (p. 63).

Stewart’s songs, as we see, had remarkably coherent language both in rough sketches and finished lyrics. He examined themes within his lyrics from more than one perspective, contrasting his views of the past with those of today and even imagined them in the future. He considered others’ views of his self and his beliefs. His material featured numerous emotion words and phrases. Many of them invited examination, examination that initiated new verbalisations on previously unexpressed emotion, each one providing another link in the chain of safe examination of his “emotional life” (p. 63).

As Cordobes’ participants spontaneously did, Stewart, too, “created a work...and experienced self-transcendency” (p. 63), features necessary to the construction of meaning. Among other elements, Stewart’s songs revealed, to me and to himself, a persistent hopefulness of the type Cordobes’ describes: hope for the future, that the best in human behaviour prevail, and for his continued growth.

**Edgerton**

This study supports many of Edgerton’s findings, in particular that songwriting helped to facilitate a success-oriented activity and, I add guardedly, to increase client self-esteem and promote self-expression. First, as a single-client activity, I feel that therapeutic songwriting can certainly improve one’s self-esteem and provide opportunity for a success-based activity. Self-expression in a
clinical group is often very different from that found in one on one session. They are not always comparable.

But, though her work focused on the group experience, some of the above points easily generalised to my work with Stewart. Of the three points above, most relevant to this study is Edgerton’s success-oriented activity, client self-esteem being objectively not quantifiable, and promotion of self-expression an overarching goal requiring careful consideration (one can, after all, be ‘expressing’ oneself by smashing a glass on the ground. What was the motivation or objective?). Stewart had lived his life mostly without opportunities for positive accomplishments, and the desire to celebrate accomplishments that naturally follows. Now, he had cause to celebrate. And, within the context of his desire to accomplish something (writing a song) consistently attained by those whom he admired (musicians and other recording artists), I hypothesise that his accomplishments held even more impact for him.

Freed

This study also supports Freed’s (1987) work with chemically dependent persons. Recall her desire to facilitate new coping strategies for her participants through analysis of lyrics and how they experienced validation for their feelings (though in a group setting). Freed’s ‘basic psychological needs’ that must be met before new strategies can be learned were the needs to:

- share thoughts and feelings feel competent
- know they ‘belong’ and are united with others in some (positive) way
- experience affection
• experience pleasurable sensory nourishment.

Stewart experienced validation for and support of his emerging emotional life throughout this project. As stated earlier, he was just beginning to share thoughts and feelings, struggling to find where he ‘belonged.’ Though in recovery from years of drug use for just a few months, it was typical that he was still in process of changing his behaviours and thought processes. This is consistent with addiction recovery theories that highlight the need to replace old thought patterns, to learn new strategies and to actually live differently beyond the mere removal of chemical dependency from one’s life (Duncan & Miller, 2000 et al). When an activity ceases, another must take its place. It becomes necessary that the recovering person find healthy replacements.

As in Freed’s work, Stewart’s feeling of competence, of knowing that he belonged and could “unite with another,” were well supported by his songwriting experiences. His surprise at being able to write a song (“I guess it’s not so hard after all”) grew into acknowledgement that he was now a collaborator with someone whom he knew to have extensive experience. Also in support of Freed’s study, there is little question that Stewart and I shared a clinically appropriate “affection” for each other, or that he experienced “sensory nourishment” through his work.

O’Callaghan & O’Brien

Before discussion of O’Callaghan’s and O’Brien’s work as they relate to this study, I will offer a few words regarding O’Callaghan’s Songwriting Paradigm
and the differences and many similarities her work and mine share. Recall the
Paradigm (my additions or changes are in bold letters):

1. Song writing is offered to a client if it seems appropriate.
2. A topic is chosen or suggested.
3. Brainstorming on the chosen topic.
4. Ideas that emerge are grouped, by the therapist, into themes. I present the themes I have found and ask the participant if any appeals to them as a focus for the song; do they want to include all of them or do they want to start again?
5. Choice of key is offered, major or minor. Key is decided upon after we have established melodic structure. I offer the choice of modulating upward (raising the key) later in the process if the participant’s voice has warmed up and they are capable of now singing in a higher register, or I offer modulation upward as a technique for expressing urgency or intensity. Modulating downward is typically offered if the participant appears to be straining their voice.
6. Rhythm is decided upon using techniques derived from client’s speech patterns while verbalizing the lyrics.
7. Preferred mood styles are ascertained. Several are offered, based on my knowledge of client preferences, and additional alternatives they would not normally choose are sometimes suggested.
8. Melodic contours are suggested by client for each lyrical line, after being given a choice of two melodic fragments for each line of the song. Following verbalization of lyrics in speech pattern, I suggest melodies, offering three and four note melodies at first, and then some with more complexity if preferred.
9. Client chooses accompaniment, dynamics, tempo, instrumentation and voicing. I also offer options I know to be outside of their stated preferences.
10. Client is invited to name the song. I share my experiences of naming my own songs, and observing other writers’ techniques.
11. The song is written out and then, if possible, recorded.
Without directly utilising O’Callaghan’s Songwriting Paradigm, I found her songwriting process to be a companion to my own. Her work, in palliative care, was different in its approach than that of this study’s. Where palliative care focuses on the last months, days or moments of a client’s life, each of this study’s participants was very active in prolonging their lives. Some expressed hopelessness and depression at times but none was living with end stage AIDS. Nonetheless, this study supports O’Callaghan’s conclusion that songwriting can offer someone “opportunities to creatively express themes significant to their life experiences, enabling them to live out their life, and avoid (merely) existing until death” (p. 89). Each of Stewart’s songs had a meaningful place in living his life. He expressed themes powerfully relevant to his life experience. He acknowledged the presence and significance of painful memories, facilitated their integration into his current life and shared his future plans and hopes for himself and the world.

O’Brien, who we recall also cited O’Callaghan’s paradigm, found the alliance created between herself and her bone-marrow transplant clients to be “positive, self affirming, enjoyable, expressive and musically creative” (p. 10). As I conclude, Stewart and I certainly enjoyed a similar experience. He and I in fact established the above points of ‘positive, enjoyable and expressive’ as the foundation for the ‘field of play’ that allowed our explorations.

This study did not seek to replicate O’Brien’s findings regarding in-depth analysis of clinical verbal interactions. I conclude, though, that the activity of songwriting provided Stewart, time and again, both the means and motivation to verbally engage in topics where his comfort level was historically low. Stewart
was someone who clearly wanted to 'grow' and he also wanted to make music. By approaching his emotional life via his musical self I believe that he gave himself greater and easier access to an emotional life he already possessed but was unfamiliar with.

**The Warning**

Recall that Stewart’s songs revealed themes consistent with other Centre writers in the pilot study with the exception of warnings to others about the dangers of drug use. His lyrics did not feature this warning element while all but one of the other Centre participants’ lyrics did. Also of potential interest to me was that, of all participants, only Stewart was in active recovery from use of illicit injection drugs. Was this merely coincidental? My experience told me that it was not but the sample size of participants was too small to warrant such a hypothesis. A future study comparing the lyric content of active drug users’ songs with those of recently recovered individuals could shed light on this area of interest.

**Regression**

By far the greatest difficulty we experienced in our sessions, facilitating a momentary writer’s block, occurred when Stewart attempted to write on the subject of his own sexual abuse history for song No. 2. This was difficult for me because it was the first occurrence of a suggestion of mine with notably negative consequences. When presented with the topic that produced “I Am Your Son”, which included the many subjects of: abuse, drug use, prison, social
marginalisation and HIV/AIDS, Stewart offered that “I could maybe say some things about the early stuff.”

Attempting to express thoughts on this theme, he rose from his chair and paced quickly up and down the room, tossing out phrases such as, “It started when I was a boy,” then, “No, not that” and beginning again, “Things happened that shouldn’t have happened” and again expressing dissatisfaction. After only a minute or two of this agitated activity I told him that of course he did not have to write on this topic. It was only one of several that I suggested within the theme for song No. 2: “What the world should know about me but doesn’t”. He sat down again, and we re-worked the topic into that which became “I Am Your Son.”

This song’s lyrics did, of course, eventually include references to difficult childhood experience: “Started when I was a little boy,” “Not being able to see the joy,” “Oh, what you do not know.” They emerged, though, after Stewart began by describing the life of a drug addict mis-judged by the world. Perhaps the choice to begin with this topic (being misunderstood and labelled), painful though not previously unexpressable, allowed for the consideration of another, more difficult to express emotion (childhood memories of confusion and powerlessness)?

I had not encouraged him to move in this direction other than to mention abuse in a list of potential topics, but he seemed either to want to do so and found it difficult, or perhaps believed he was expected to. Could this have been the goal of previous counselling experience? Was Stewart feeling obliged to
comply with the wishes of me, another ‘authority’ figure? In a follow up question, I asked if he in fact had counselling experience and Stewart reported that he had only had one or two single, unsatisfying sessions. I did not press him as to why he thought he had selected that topic of the several presented.

Herman (1997) writes that, in successful recovery, the client must be assisted through gradual shifts “from unpredictable danger to reliable safety, from dissociated trauma to acknowledged memory (author’s italics), and from stigmatised isolation to restored social connection” (p. 155). I have reported throughout this paper on Stewart’s movement “from danger to safety” and “from isolation to social connection.” He had not, however, entered the clinical milieu with the aim of directly addressing past trauma. Had he done so, our work would certainly have taken a different path. Since he had not done so, our work instead followed the contour of his gradually increasing level of comfort with the activity at hand: emotional investigation through therapeutic songwriting. I made it clear that we would explore, in a variety of ways, what his songs meant to him, and that I would do my utmost to keep him feeling safe and comfortable while we did so.

When I was momentarily unclear as to my intentions regarding revisiting the past, the difference in the clinical atmosphere was marked, uncomfortable and enough of a warning to me to make me forever wary of the value of that intervention.

I recommend that therapists conducting work of this nature give extraordinary consideration to the potential consequences of initiating
regression. My experience has shown me that, for many who have survived multiple traumas, revisiting the past, though long a tool of many psychotherapy schools, can sometimes be merely an invitation to relive the anxious confusion and stressful emotional upheaval already experienced once before. The participant is not guaranteed to be in a better position today than they were at the moment of original traumatic impact simply by ‘being there’ once again.

Can Songs Say What Words Alone Cannot?

As I have described, the discussions engendered by our songs were numerous and detailed. They performed important functions by:

- combining the familiar element of speech with a new one, music, the result being a new yet familiar tool to use in examination of life issues;
- adding depth to emerging themes;
- preparing the writer(s) for the song to be written next, linking past, present and future.

I again note that Stewart revealed more emotional resonance in his songs' lyrics and the discussions that followed than he did by verbal means alone. When we wrote a song, reviewed it, performed it, examined its lyric content and pondered future writings, I consistently observed him gradually ‘open up’ to sharing the emotional content he was uncovering. What had writing a song provided that words alone could not? Was he experiencing a newly generated thought or feeling that had merely been given a musical setting, or was the thought or feeling ‘there’ in a non-verbal form waiting to be ‘unlocked’?
I felt that Stewart actually had more confidence in his capabilities than he verbally expressed, "I'm just scared to write...it scares me...not be happy with what I'm putting out...just scared to be a bad writer." He possessed the self-image of a timid person intimidated by the thought of not living up to arbitrary expectations. Yet he not only agreed to write with me but also chose to, for example, write original music for the "Imagine" theme rather than use the existing song's melody. Of the pilot study participants, only one other, one who had previous semi-professional music experiences, chose to do so. Stewart was equally confident and even more so when writing song No. 2. He offered choices for chord selection, embraced my suggestion to use rapping, a musical motif largely foreign to him, and initiated the personal and emotional lyric content.

His emerging self-assuredness was another example of a positive faculty hidden (from him) under layers of well-rehearsed, and flawed, self-image. In words he labelled himself "scared" but his actions showed him creating, and rising to, challenges. Perhaps, through therapeutic songwriting, Stewart was able to bypass his socially imposed self-image and access his emotions on particular topics as if for the first time. Accustomed as he was to keeping certain emotions away from consciousness, they were rarely expressed and then only by rote. Now, however, they were available to him by suspending his usual mindset, by empathic collaboration and by safe exploration. He actively examined his thoughts from a multitude of new angles and this new multi-dimensional experience allowed for the safe reintegration of previously difficult feelings.
Within the flow of musical creation Stewart found a means by which to unlock thoughts on emotional subjects, and to detour around the spoken words he was accustomed to. He ventured onto a new path where he was safe to explore emotional life in a new way. He acknowledged those feelings, thoughts and emotions to himself (and to another) and then integrated them into his daily feelings, thoughts and emotional processes.

**One Song Leads To Another**

Recall from Chapter IV the ‘extra’ song “Finding My Way,” which I included because it illustrated the reaching into the future quality that I intended to be a part of the songwriting process. This song contained one or two new dimensions to our familiar process. A discussion about lyrics written for a previous song initiated the writing that day of music for those lyrics, thus creating a new song. In depth discussion about the emotions evoked by the new song prompted further discussion of the theme as it pertained to Stewart’s emotional life. This in turn laid the foundation for yet another song, this time with a lyric theme initiated for the first time by Stewart.

Thus began a period of writing that continued far beyond the study. Stewart thereafter brought in topics he wanted to write about and I continued to assist as much as he seemed to require.

I kept in mind my objective that he eventually write entire songs with all the elements of his choosing. I will share that, two weeks before my concluding the writing of this paper, Stewart brought to the music room a new, completed song, and he asked me for no assistance. He had written both music and lyrics
and he only wanted me to hear it. The song was homage to a volunteer who weekly purchased and delivered flowers to the Centre. I can think of no better end to this discussion of our therapeutic songwriting.
Chapter Seven - Conclusion

Over the course of this project Stewart and I looked at elements of life experience that come into play for many of us, and at the particular ways in which he lived and coped with them. These factors included: surviving trauma and living with its effects, voluntary and forced separation from ‘ordinary’ society, necessity to create safe space for exploration of alternate roles and behaviours, and reintegration and reconnection back into society on his own terms.

I strove to assist Stewart in addressing those factors clinically by means of therapeutic songwriting, hopeful that this activity would provide the safe place where he could examine feelings, attitudes and desires, and feel the freedom to consider, adopt and integrate new ones. Initially intending to merely write songs from the simple desire to be creative in the manner of the musicians he admired, Stewart eventually discovered resources within himself that he had always possessed yet had been unable to fully access.

In the end, Stewart and I shared a gift with many dimensions. Some of them did not radically surprise me. Sometimes they surprised both of us. Others were unexpectedly delightful and illuminating. We had great enjoyment writing songs together. We laughed often, traded observations about life and I shared
with him much of the knowledge I had gained during my professional career. He taught me much about correctional institutions, street life, use of various drugs and the cultures particular to each. From him I learned the potential for change, the resiliency of many of those at the bottom rung of the social ladder, and human resourcefulness.

It is important to note that we began a working relationship at a moment in his life when he was ready for the experiences we eventually had. On one hand, I feel I exercised good assessment skills by choosing to include him in this project. My instincts and my relationship with him had led me to conclude he would benefit from it, that his curiosity was ripe for engagement in musical activities, and that our rapport would serve us well for the duration. I also knew from experience that someone in active addiction, as he was not, would likely not be able to make and keep appointments or have the physical stamina to engage fully in the exercise of therapeutic songwriting as it was designed.

On the other hand, during data analysis I questioned how much my own biases or experiences had affected these outcomes, and negatively influenced the results. If I had believed him ready to begin this process, had I been as ready to do the same? My own past experiences, which emerged so fully to consciousness during data analysis, provided me with both insight and alarm. I now knew why I had such a difficult time beginning the writing process, something I usually enjoy. However, I had moments when I briefly worried that such insights as I had must be flawed if their exposition were 'infected' by such a lack of personal insight.
I was subsequently relieved to find that my enthusiasm for the clinical work of therapeutic songwriting did not change with my self-revelatory personal experience. It is possible and even likely that I had as much energy for the work as I did precisely because of my experiences and my subsequent desire to assist individuals whom I sensed had been similarly vulnerable.

As do most people, I have strong feelings about the abuse of others, particularly of children. I have a sociological sensitivity to those suffering under the illicit drug prohibitions of present day Western culture. Popular culture also does little to dispel clichés about marginalised populations. I and others believe that correctional systems are in need of extensive reform as they neither 'correct' behavioural tendencies which are in the main survival mechanisms, nor do they support healthy reintegration of released persons back into typical society.

I work in a field that sees countless abuse survivors engaged in the lifelong struggle to cope with daily living. I see them doing so without the tools that most of us have been fortunate to grow up with. I am mindful, too, that I see only those who have survived. I often feel the frustration common to professionals that 'nothing is changing' or is not changing quickly enough. I will always benefit from questioning if my desire for change is due to factors that belong to me, or is a result of careful assessment of the participant's true level of readiness.

I have some last words on my early experiences and my concern that they may have affected the results. It is not possible to pretend they were of little importance and fortunately there is substantial literature that maintains that true
clinical objectivity is neither desirable nor actually possible. I take advantage of this current, and I feel permanent, development in theoretical discourse when I suggest that the merging of both Stewart’s ‘aesthetics’ and mine, as Kenny (1989) might say, was absolutely necessary to the development of the ‘field of play’ (1989) where healing could begin. Further, if each of those aesthetics, of both therapist and client, was already “complete and whole” (p. 75), then we need not consider evidence of human fragility or confusion as deficits but rather as the place on the ground where our feet are in the moment. Change being inevitable, we have to take the opportunity to shape and steer it when we can, and to degrees that we must discover for ourselves.

Kenny states that the therapist’s aesthetic is considerable and “highly formative...because the therapist, essentially, invites the client into the broader field of play.” I invited Stewart into a field where I knew some things but not everything. When he felt safe to do so, he entered, he also knowing some things but not everything. Once safe within that field, he and I were free not just to explore, itself a substantial objective, but to see the field itself expand and open up to playfulness, possibility and change. Open as he was to change and exploration, he uncovered aspects of his identity that he could ‘try on’, appreciate, alter and assimilate. Each of the elements we explored musically had a metaphorical mirror in Stewart’s life outside of the songwriting sessions.

We each enter any situation carrying our gifts, our ‘damage’ and experiences with us; none of us is an exception. One of life’s tasks is to acknowledge the influence our environments and histories have on our behaviours, feelings and emotions. Seeing them as clearly as possible is a part of
that task. Another is to change what needs changing when we are able to, but only when we feel safe to do so. Only in a safe space could Stewart and I have ‘played with’ the past, present and future. Only by establishing a healing relationship should I have considered it. In that sharing of space, each of us expressed our humanness through interplay of our aesthetics, that part of us that perceives intuitively, that includes all of our “human tendencies, values, attitudes, life experience and all of the factors which unite to create...the person” (p. 75).

For most of his life Stewart was kept out of a society that had not taken care of him as children must be. Society addressed his survival behaviours instead of his need for them, did not mourn his absence during his numerous incarcerations, offered him little chance to change his life positively during those times and finally could not adequately protect him from acquiring the life-threatening illness that he lives with today. Still, he wanted to return to that society as a functioning productive individual, accepted and not judged. That he is today grateful for what he has instead of mourning what is lost is fortunate because he is finally enjoying his life. We, too, are fortunate because we need not fear his social behaviour. Spiritually we are fortunate in knowing that one less soul is suffering as his once did. Personally, I am satisfied that I was able to take advantage of both his and my past experiences to be a companion to him in his discovery that he was much more than others, individually and institutionally, had led him to believe.
Recordings of the songs discussed throughout this paper are included.
June 7, 2004

Mr. Jeffrey Hatcher  
Graduate Student  
Faculty of Education  
Simon Fraser University  

Dear Mr. Hatcher:

Re: A Community-Based Exploration of Therapeutic Songwriting and Illicit Drug Using Persons Living with HIV/AIDS  
Canadian Music Therapy Trust Fund  

The above-titled ethics application has been granted approval by the Simon Fraser Research Ethics Board, in accordance with Policy R 20.01, "Ethics Review of Research Involving Human Subjects".

Sincerely,

Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director  
Office of Research Ethics
APPENDIX B
Release Of “Stewart’s Story”

I hereby give my consent for the use of prior interview material for the research study, “Therapeutic Songwriting With Illicit Drug-Using Persons Living With HIV/AIDS,” principle investigator Jeffrey Hatcher, M.T.A. I understand that this material, entitled “Stewart’s Story,” will be presented only in educational settings and for educational purposes.

I have received a copy of this consent document for my own records.

Stewart Wilson ___________________ May 31, 2004
Name of Participant (printed) Signature Date

Jeffrey Hatcher ___________________ May 31, 2004
Name of witness (printed) Signature Date
APPENDIX C
The Songs

**IF PEOPLE CAME TOGETHER AS ONE** - by Stewart Wilson & Jeffrey Hatcher

If people came together as one
How the world would have so much fun
People would not be starving anymore, and children would eat

Imagine this world as it is
What a beautiful place it is to me, can't you see?
The beauty of the oceans runs so blue so deep
It leads me to the highest peak

**CHORUS**

Why is there so much war? People fighting in the street
Thinking they're making ends meet, I know there's a better way

I see myself tomorrow and
Us together as one
Enjoying the beauty of this earth and its circling sun
The beauty of the oceans runs so deep
It leads me to the highest mountain peak

**CHORUS**
I AM YOUR SON - by Stewart Wilson & Jeffrey Hatcher

People see me in a different light
Seem to read the cover, read the cover but not the book
And never understand what's God's real plan
Judgements without reading the book

This is me you do not know, how deep the pain really goes
Started when I was a little boy
Not being able to see the joy, oh what you do not know
Please read the book

CHORUS - I am an addict I am your son
I come before you asking love
I ask a judgement you not make for this could be a big mistake

You might shun me might not understand, you might even throw me in a garbage can
But please remember this could be your son, or anyone

We are the same we are as one, we come before God like everyone
Mistakes we may have made a few, I have never judged you
Please remember what I'm trying to say
Is that we should try to love for just another day

CHORUS
FINDING MY WAY - Lyrics by Stewart Wilson, music by SW & Jeffrey Hatcher

I grew up on the street
Trying to make ends meet
I am just a man
Living, trying to get through another day

CHORUS:
Finding my way, finding my way
Finding my way, finding my way

Nobody cares to help me
I was so young grew up in a hurry
And the streets seemed to say
They had won, and stopped me from

CHORUS

I have tried so hard to get out
But wherever I go black clouds seem to follow
Has the world gone mad?
All is lost and sad
Is there any light for me?

CHORUS
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Coda: In the proofreading of this paper one typographical error was allowed to remain. Readers who identify this flight of editorial fancy are encouraged to contact the author. JH