

OPENING HEARTS: A PARALOGUE

By Gisela Schwarz, with Lynn Hoffman and Mrs. A. the "Transforming Mother"

Lynn's Introduction: *Why do I use the word Paralogue for this story?*

When Gisela and I began to write back and forth about the people she was seeing, I was reading the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard about postmodernism, a concept that he made famous by defining it as ³incredulity to metanarratives.² Lyotard goes on to describe a ³postmodern² conversational style. In the paragraph below, he suggests how it differs from the usual forms of Western argument or or debate. Here's what he says:

"For us, a language is first and foremost someone talking. But there are language games in which the important thing is to listen, in which the rule deals with audition. Such a game is the game of the just. And in this game, one speaks only inasmuch as one listens, that is, one speaks as a listener, and not as an author. It is a game without an author. In the same way, the speculative game of the West is a game without a listener, because the only listener tolerated by the speculative philosopher is the disciple.

This compressed notion swelled inside my mind. What did Lyotard mean by the emphasis on listening? What was so special about ³a game of audition?² And most of all, how was such a process to be thought of as a ³game of the just?² I had long wanted a way to talk about a style of communication founded on the qualities of what I call my Three Pillars of Wisdom: Goolishian and Anderson's Not Knowing,² Tom Andersen's Reflecting Process, and the Witnessing practices of Michael White. These ideas were helpful in creating unusually responsive conversational networks.

Another inspired concept used by Lyotard was the term ³paralogy.² Originally, ³paralogy² was a Greek word defined as ³nonsense,² since it carried the sense of bypassing or ³going beside² logic, but that was exactly what Lyotard wanted. He felt that postmoderns needed a way of speaking that was not tied to an if-then causality, and did not insist on any one ³truth.² This form of discourse would value collaboration over competition, and would respect contradictions rather than trying to get rid of them. Taking this thought further, I felt that the type of online exchange that Gisela and I were experimenting with could then be called a Paralogue rather than a Dialogue or a Metalogue. Gisela agreed with me, so that is what we did.

Gisela's Introduction: *Why do I call this story ³Opening hearts²?*

One day while driving home after a long day in my office, while thinking of the many clients I work with, I wondered how I could describe my work with them? The question I always put to myself is: How to open the doors to their hearts and mind? How to help people find the doors to the rooms behind their pains, sorrow and desperation?

How to show them that it is better to acknowledge the pains in their life instead of overriding it, by doing too much, being too ambitious, or just ignoring it and letting the body suffer?

Sometimes I realize I have to behave ³as if² I were a mountain guide who is telling people that when they feel panic they must focus on the step in

the present, not looking around, only being aware that each foot stands firm on the ground. My tool is the trust people develop in my guidance and their acknowledgment of my capacities as a guide.

So it fit well, when I read a few weeks ago in a research newspaper, that psychotherapy is like talking with a good friend. But what is the meaning of "like talking with a good friend"? It is the word "like" that has to be defined. "Like" doesn't mean you are a friend. It means rather, "You talk to me "as if " you are a friend." It is then up to me to decide whether to open a door to my heart.

THE BEGINNING

This story began in February 2000. Mrs. A. asked for psychotherapy, recommended to me by her general practitioner after the suicide of her 21 year old son. My first impression was: this woman is falling apart and I am not sure if therapy and medication can help her to put all the different parts of her soul and body together again. Shortly after beginning my journey with her, I asked her if she would mind if we included a colleague who was also a mentor, teacher, and friend of mine, Lynn Hoffman, so that we would have more than one heart and one mind to accompany us. She agreed. I put the same question to Lynn and she too agreed. So we three started our journey together through very hard and dry and often dangerous terrain.

When I described the way Mrs. A. was feeling to Lynn, she began to refer to her as our "Desperate Mother." After a little more than a one year, there had been changes that led Lynn to call our mother a "Sad Mother," and then a "Transforming Mother" and as usual, I told Mrs. R. what she said. These changing titles marked a process which was steadily flowing from one place to another and is still evolving.

The following is an email exchange between Lynn and myself that chronicles the principal stages of this journey in the hope of sharing it with our colleagues. It is put together and written with the permission of my client who, in the meantime, has crossed many mountains and deserts and has opened doors to new meanings in her life.

It is not commented on a theoretical base, since Lynn Hoffman and me wanted the "narrative" to flow and reflect on itself.

It's simply a story- a narrative discourse that speaks for itself and shall invite the reader to open up doors to reflect on this story.

By reading further you will find that there are different stories involved. One is about her son, their relationship- love and long farewell. Another is the one about her relationship with her husband and how it changed. Other stories include the changes in her relationships with her own mother and with her daughter. Finally, this chronicles the building up of new friendships, new interests and, maybe most important, a new relationship with her body. Here begins the first installment.

Feb. 2000

Dear Lynn:

Yesterday I had a first talk with a woman, my age, whose 21 year old son committed suicide by strangling himself three months ago. I saw and heard how much she was struggling to keep herself together. During the session I had again and again the feeling she would fall apart. At one point she said: "When I am standing at the grave of my son, I have the feeling that my heart has gone into the grave with him." I remembered your telling me about a case where you spoke of a mother and son who were like "two beating hearts"

with the same blood supply,² and where it could have been disastrous to sever a vein. Here it seemed as if a vein was already severed and I couldn't see how she could get her heart back. Can you help me out? She knows that we work via e-mail and welcomes your joining us. Our next appointment is in a month.

March 2000

Dear Gisela:

Thank you for tell me about the woman whose son killed himself. That is so terrible that my spirit fails me in even thinking about it. It is useless to tell her to put the grief behind her, as that's not possible. The only piece of hope I could find was that she said that her heart went into the grave with his. So she now has a double heart, and as long as she lives, his heart will be part of hers. I was thinking that all persons have dreams and ideals. Which ones did he leave behind? Which ones did she share with him? How can she continue this important work in his name?

I also asked myself, ³How can she build him an ongoing shrine?² This could be a secret shrine, of course, no need to announce it from the rooftops except to a chosen few. Let me know if she would allow me to join those chosen few. I am a mother too, and I know that parents who have a child is like giving a hostage to the universe. I am sending a picture of me, so she can see what I look like.

March 2000

Dear Lynn:

News from one coast of our invisible reflecting team. I met today our desperate mother and she told me that she had been this morning at the grave of her son and brought there palm fronds instead of a candle. I transmitted to her your message of the double heart. Hearing this she started crying, but also talking. She told me that every day in the morning this trembling inside her starts and then her whole face is trembling as if it is falling apart and she cannot bring a cup to her mouth.

This inner and outer trembling stops only when she walks to the grave in the late afternoon and stays there talking to her son. I asked her, what pictures she could paint for me about the late afternoon in the days when her son was still alive. She said that the late afternoon and the evening were always full of fear, because he always left home after supper, going to an inn to drink beer and then driving fast with his car. This was always when she waited for the sirens of the ambulance. ³Now,² she said, ³I need not wait anymore.² I said, ³You know that he and you are both safe.² She breathed out deeply, and we talked about the mess she says she has in her house and that this corresponds with her inner rooms and that she doesn't want to alter anything for the moment. She told me that she is wearing one of her son's shirts and that she feels hugged in it.

We also talked about spiritual things, and I said to her that there would be no sense in this life, if our visible realities were all that existed - that there are energies and bonds and bridges both visible and invisible. We also talked about her childhood. She spoke about how hard it was to grow up as an

illegitimate child and she said that the nearest person to her had been her grandmother. She recounted how she and her husband had always had an open house and welcomed their children and their friends. She said, ³I knew that my son was always a shy child, but when I tried to get closer to him, he became very rude.² She thinks that his decision to die has something to do with her---he didn't want to bring her any more troubles.

She also told me that her depression had started many years ago. She remembers going up the stairs from her garden to the house, when she suddenly felt that something inside her broke. She had never had this feeling before. And from that time her depressed feelings started. I told her to move slow and only do things she feels she can stand. I said that she has a wise feeling about how far and how quickly to go and that she shouldn't let anyone urge her to move faster. I said, ³You have a double heart now and getting used to it will take time.² She told me she hasn't been able to cry; it is as if it is too much, and her tears have dried up for now. Similarly, when she reads the name of her son on the grave-stone, she cannot yet realize what it means.

At the end of the session she said that I should tell you, that this picture of the double heart, especially from a mother like herself, has brought her much comfort. Some time later, she told me that the shaking feeling in the morning had gone away. The idea of the double heart accompanied us through many other sessions. Whenever there was a desperate time, she said, ³Please tell your colleague, imagining the double heart helps me to survive.²

19.10.2000

Dear Lynn:

Since our last exchange, our Desperate Mother is experiencing some new feelings which she asked me to tell you about. She is not fighting with herself and her body any more but is beginning to question her relationship with her husband. After many big fights with him during the summer, she has learned how to respond without swallowing her anger. This was a way for her to feel better and also for her husband to experience some limit-setting in their relationship. So she felt a little better and went out for walks, re-arranged furniture in the house and changed a few other things. But now, since fall has come, she once again felt restless and tired and was frequently weeping. The anniversary of her son's dying comes in about one week, so I think that this is a very sensitive time.

One thing that makes me feel particularly insecure is that she has not changed anything in her boy's room. Not even the bed and laundry. The last time she came, a few days ago, she told me that for the first time she had a feeling of strangeness toward her son. She could not imagine him and could not see him as usual and talk to him. So she brought me pictures of him to look at. During this session we talked about the changes in her life that have occurred since her son's death. It seems that his death can now be seen as helping the family, just like a sacrifice. Her husband and daughter, and also her sister, have begun to talk together in a new way. Even though they sometimes quarrel, they now try to express how they feel about each other where before they had accepted the lack of communication, saying that it was not possible to change. Last weekend, for example, her husband had told her that he wanted to give her a weekend holiday as a present. She said that this was unprecedented, and that she never had expected such a present.

At the same time, she says she weeps very often, thinking about how, when her son left the house for the last time, she had known that he would never

come back. She says this over and over. And I feel unsure about what to do with these memories that she keeps talking about. So this is where we are at the moment. Our next meeting will be one day after the anniversary of her son's death. Love, Gisela

31.10.2000

Dear Gisela,

Thank you for writing me about our Desperate Mother. All I can tell you is that it is common to have upwellings of grief at the anniversary of an event that has had such long-reaching effects. Her son's room is now a shrine to the good that has come of his suffering. I am reminded of the boy in the Hans Christian Anderson story, who was stolen away by the Snow Queen who then put a splinter of ice in his heart. When his sister Gerda found him, it finally melted and he could feel again. Perhaps this whole family had an ice splinter in its heart, which is now melting.

12.02.2001

Dear Lynn:

In an hour I will meet with our Desperate Mother. She has told me that she wants to leave her marriage for a while and go to South Africa to work for an NGO. On the one hand, I feel this is a wonderful thing for her to do, like a new start after the death of her son. On the other hand, she says that her husband has developed feelings of hatred against me. So I am not happy about this side of the development. What are your feelings? Love, Gisela

12.03.2001

Dear Gisela:

It would be hard for any therapist to know whether to encourage or discourage this lonely mother in her plans for a new life. At least you now know what effect your relationship to her is having on her husband. Maybe you could share your dilemma and ask her if she has any ideas to help you out. But you will have to convince her that if you make an effort to see her husband, it will be what her son always wanted - someone who would make a connection, no matter how indirect, between the two parentse, and take the burden off him. This could be as simple as seeing him alone, but it would be better if you could see them together, simply to establish a new conversation between them without allowing them to blame each other. Tom Andersen's reflecting process might be useful here - you could talk with one, while the other listens, then shift. You can tell them that this will make the spirit of the son feel happy.

13.02.2001

Dear Lynn:

I forgot to tell you that I had already asked our mother whether she wants to invite her husband to come. She answered that he will not come now that their relationship is in such a crisis. Do you think I should tell her to ask him to come one time alone? I fear she might get jealous in the same way as with her son? What do you think?

4.03.2001

Dear Lynn:

In our last meeting, I told our Desperate Mother that she should not give up on inviting her husband to a meeting with us, and that it would be very helpful and maybe relieving if she and he could talk about her plans for leaving. She seemed a little bit more open to those ideas and we will see what she brings with her this week.

Shortly after this, I met with both and in this session I tried to help to give the grief of her husband a voice.

Since this meeting he has become far more accepting of our conversations.

28. 03.01

Dear Lynn,

Last week, when I saw our Desperate Mother, she seemed breathless and told me that she has much to tell me about her husband and her mother. She was shaking a little bit, but said that she has made up her mind to go her own way, meaning that she will do things on her own. She says that her husband sees that she is changing from the clothes of a woman who is only looking after her husband, house and children, to the clothes of a woman who wants something for herself. And she speaks it out loudly and gives me concrete examples. She had asked her husband to accompany her to the cemetery to plant new flowers on their son's grave. When he didn't show up at the time both of them had agreed on, she phoned him and he said he would come in a few minutes. Again, he didn't show up, so she went by herself, knowing that he had no key for the house. They met on the way and he asked her if she knew that he had no key and she said, ³Yes.² Then he got very angry and said, ³How could you leave the house when you knew this?² And she said ³How could you not show up as we agreed? Next time you will have to wait for me in the garden or go elsewhere.² He was furious. It was a day before either of them talked to each other.

I said to her that I could understand her wish to be accompanied by him when going to the grave, but that I could also sense his fear to go there and look at the gravestone. When I said this, her face became a little softer and she said, ³I still care for him and I know he cares for me, but I can't help behaving this way.² I felt a similar helplessness. I asked if we should consult you at that point for some little rays of sunshine. She said: "Yes. I will never forget how the picture of the double heart guided me through the darkest hours." ³

During this session, she also told me that she had gone to Vienna to check out the development aid job, but was told that there would be no job. She felt disappointed, because she says that Africa and the people there have something she feels drawn to. All the same, she will keep on driving twice a week to Graz for her English lessons and do the training at the Red Cross. Every time she comes out of her house she says she feels better. The time when she only wanted to stay at home seems to be over.

Then she said, ³I have to tell you about my mother.² Her mother is living alone. She had a boy-friend, but this relationship ended a year ago, and now she has panic attacks, and goes from hospital to hospital, staying for about two weeks and then being released. The daughter took her in for a few days, but says she has not the energy to do more. She would like her to see a psychotherapist, as she feels it is not right to be so involved in the life of her mother. Then our time was over and I told her that different stories or even different parts of stories, are becoming visible and that next time

we will see how they connect and where to go next. I said that I would ask you for some ideas, to help me to step back a bit. She agreed but said it would be hard to wait. So every day there are surprises.

29.05.2001

Dear Gisela:

All I can say is that here is no longer a Desperate Mother but a Transforming Mother. Not only is she transforming herself but she is transforming the people close to her, as they encounter her new shape. Transforming persons have a powerful effect on everybody else, and that is why they have to move slowly. The closing of the door to Africa is a message not to move too fast or go too far, at least not yet.

But Gisela, I want to appreciate your phrasing when you told our mother that there are different stories which have become visible and that we will have to see how they connect and where to move next. I once was a workshop leader in a situation where I wanted the panelists to move away from a table that separated them from the rest of the group and join a large circle. Everyone did as I asked except for one venerable professor who came from Japan and his entourage of younger people. I repeated my request. He still remained seated. I thought maybe he did not understand English. Then, to my surprise, several of the young men and one young woman behind him, also began getting up. The professor got up too. Only then did I realize that a wire connected him to the woman, who was the translator, and that the rest of the group was wired to her too. They all shuffled carefully together to a place in the circle and sat down. I felt quite upset that I had put them in such an embarrassing position. So this became a story that I tell when I warn people to be careful about pushing people around.

But I want you to tell our Transforming Mother how proud I am of her, and to tell her that I know how hard it is to make such huge changes as she has done. Love, Lynn

9.06.2001

Dear Lynn:

Today I met our Transforming Mother, and she told me that although she had recently felt very energetic concerning her personal life, she again is drawn back to thoughts about her son's death. In our session today she was tracing the story of "why" he did this to himself. She is afraid to ask her son's colleagues at work about his last hours, but she says this thought is always accompanying her. It seems to me that she is now on the track of an investigation, thinking that there is something that is not seen and not spoken. I said to her that grown-up children always have parts of their lives they don't want to tell their parents about and that we as grown-ups should respect their secrets. But she said that maybe it has something to do with his girlfriend. He had a girlfriend who was working as a prostitute. He had brought this girlfriend to his parents' home to live there, but it didn't work out. She stole things and the parents had thrown her out and told their son that he could not bring her home again. As a result, he moved out and rented a room with her, then after some months returned home. But our mother believes that they continued to be in touch with each other. Some neighbours had told her that this girl had come to the hall where his body was laid out.

Listening to this story, I had a feeling of heaviness and tiredness and a sense of something hidden, which is seductive to look at, but if we look at this, we look away from something else. So I told our mother to arrange a

deal with this ³investigation part.² She can give it a time to be there, when she is thinking about it, but then tell this part that she wants to stop and carry on with her everyday life. I told her to tell this part that it will have a time in our sessions. This thought relieved her very much, and she said that she went away with a feeling of lightness, after having carried so many heavy stones. Love, Gisela

25.06.2002

Dear Gisela,

I haven't been able to write you, despite your very interesting letter about the transforming mother, because I am having some unpleasant dental work. However, I believe you did just right in asking our mother if she could "arrange a deal" with her wish to investigate. I believe we can choose more than one autobiography, and the one represented by an investigation often ends in a charge of crime. This doesn't mean one shouldn't try to find out the larger context of a shocking act, but in the process of doing detective work, one risks becoming both prosecutor and prosecuted.

I like our mother's story about her son being open and not withdrawn like his father. Now she can add that he was able to fall in love with someone, which shows that love was part of what he got as a child too. And this mother's ability to move in new directions shows that there was always brightness and life in the family, struggling to get out. If she can continue to honor this brightness, I deeply believe this will influence her daughter in a positive way. Much love, Lynn

3.07.2001

Dear Lynn:

Our Transforming Mother was here and she had wanted to read what you had written to her in English. I said I'd have to look for it and let her read it the next time, but I told her that you had written that her son had experienced love in his family and could give it to others, even to such a woman as he had chosen, and then she cried loudly and said afterward, ³"This was very hard to hear." At the end of the session she again said it was hard to hear, but yes, she said, he had got much love and a smile came over her face. There seemed to be both sun and rain.

5.07.2001

Dear Gisela:

That is very touching feedback from our Transforming Mother - tears, then joy. These emotions are closer than one thinks! I have shed many tears over a daughter of mine who also brings me joy. I will write more later. Love, Lynn

06. 9.2001

Dear Lynn,

Here is the weekly story of our ³mother in transformation." As she understands English well, and is also doing a training course, I read your words to her and did not have to translate. While I was reading tears came to her eyes and ran down and in the pause between stopping to read and starting to talk there was a very close feeling "as if" you were sitting in the chair next to both of us. I would have liked you to be there to continue

the conversation since it seemed so hard for me at the moment not to give her the possibility for a direct exchange. Then she said: "Please tell Mrs. Hoffman I do thank her for all and I keep on hoping she will find a way to her daughter."²

Then we talked about the process of transforming and how much she is aware of this intense process that keeps on going. Even if Africa is not possible at the moment, she told me, she knows that this door has not closed. And also remembering our last session, where we didn't know how the stories could connect, she said that she had handed over the story of the fears about her mother to her mother and a physician, because it is too much for her to handle. She also said that the communication story with her husband is for the time being at loose ends.

What really intrigues her now is looking for her own path. She remembered that when she was 18 years old she wanted to become a truckdriver in Canada, only one of many visions of how to go out into the world and feel free. She said that her mother had been very controlling and she had never been allowed to go outside to meet friends. One day after a quarrel, because she had an affair with a married man, she left home and rented a room in a hotel. This was the first time she had worked and she never went back. After a year, she told me, she met her husband and a year later they married. And from this moment she cannot remember ever having any more wishes for herself.

While our mother was telling this story, the atmosphere had completely changed in the room. There was a feeling of youngness and curiosity, and she looked a little bit like a teenager. She said, "All this time, I was only thinking of my children and family."² She never felt any feeling either of freedom or narrowness, it was just that there were the children and this was it. And now that her daughter has her own family and her son is dead, she starts to remember that there was once a time where she had wishes of her own. I had the feeling that now a new chapter in our sessions could begin. I will ask her next time if this is also true for her.

At the end of the session, she told me that in the night she sometimes calls out for her son, because she misses him, and then it is always hard to wake up, because she says: "I really need him." Before she left the room, she turned and said again, "Don't forget to greet Mrs Hoffman from me and tell her I thank her and that I think of her."² I said, "I will not forget."² This was the last session for the summer. With love, Gisela

24.09.01

Dear Lynn:

Our Transforming Mother was just here, and she tells me she is crying very much, perhaps because the anniversary of the death of her son is approaching. She brought me a bunch of sunflowers from her garden, really beautiful ones, and some grapes from her vineyard. And she told me that she has come to feel that her son committed suicide for his parents. She told me that he had promised her a few days before he died that he would go with her to the woods to look for mushrooms. He didn't keep his promise, but she recently found some mushrooms on his grave, and she said she believes that this is a sign from him.

With much love and many thoughts across the ocean, Gisela

29.09.2001

Dear Gisela,

Please tell our Transforming Mother what a small miracle it was that she found mushrooms on her son's grave. Tell her that I needed to hear that story for my own sake. Much love to you, Lynn

27.10. 01

Dear Lynn:

Today our Transforming Mother was here. She said that for the first time since the death of her son, she has mornings when she wakes up full of energy and then forgets to take her medication, but one day later she feels that she is not yet "whole". She then starts trembling and feels this restlessness in her heart. By feeling the restlessness she knows that her way through all the sorrow is still not finished. I conveyed her your message and she begged me to tell you, that she is always waiting for your words, looking forward to taking them in. She told me, that half on her part and half on her husband`s wish, she had cleaned up her son`s room , but that she was feeling so bad and empty the day after. She had washed the bedspread and put it in a drawer. It was a special linen spread she had bought for him with the picture of a clown a little bit smiling and a little bit sad on it. She said he had loved it. But she wanted me to know that it was not ³kitsch² and maybe she will bring this spread next time to show me.

Then, following your thoughts, I said that maybe she should not put the clean spread away, but put it on the bed again, so that it is still her son`s room. I said, "You cleaned it, as you did in former times when your son came home regularly, but why not clean it to put it on for times you are longing for him, or sitting down spinning the wheel of memories and wanting to be close to him, or cuddling yourself in it." A smile swept over her face and she said, ³I will think of this.²

We then talked about other places in her house where she can find her son`s presence, and she said she has symbols that her husband would never know or understand. She had never wiped away his fingertips under the chair in the kitchen where he used to sit when he came home with oily fingers from work. She never took out two spots in the kitchen carpet where some cheese crumbs had fallen and are now engraved in the carpet. She still has in her bathroom the toothpaste tube she and he had in common, a relic of the times when he came down from his room shouting : "Mama I have forgotten to buy toothpaste , can I use yours?? She also has a picture of him with one of his friends laughing in her ironing room, to have him watching while doing her wash. All these things, she said, no one else knows about. Her face lighted up while telling me this.

Then she told me that her husband wants to celebrate his 50th birthday in April, although hers is a year later, and at this moment, she doesn`t want to celebrate anything. She rejects getting or giving gifts since her son`s death. At the first Christmas after his death, she thought she could not bear to get any, because she had the feeling that they would never again be filled with anything she could want. All of them would be empty and it is still the same now. And, she continued, it had been a custom between her and her son and daughter that, when she ordered Christmas or birthday presents, there was always a surprise package for each of them. As soon as they came home, they started at once loosening the ribbons. She is still doing this for her daughter.

It was a warm and deeply connected talk between us, and she and I had the feeling that you were included and through your heartfelt message present.

Here the reflecting process flowed, as you like to say, through underground rivers, which connected at certain river roads. I think this is why, in leaving, she asked me to give her kind and warm wishes to you. She then wanted to fix a date shortly before Christmas and left me a present - a moon made of willow wood with small bulbs in it to put in the window. It is charming and gives my room a special feeling of light from a universe far away. Love as ever, Gisela

18.11.2001

Dear Gisela,

Thanks for your beautiful and amazing description of our transforming mother's way of keeping her son's spirit alive. I am relieved that she is not putting her son's room away, as you put things in a closet. I think she should always have a little altar or shelf or other space where she can commune with him privately. I also think our Transforming Mother shares your visionary gift. Her spirituality is profound, and her son is part of it. In such cases, I really think one can "speak to the dead." Our Mother knows how important it is to keep these beloved persons alive by communicating with them in secret ways and never letting them go. This brings my love, Gisela, and wishes for a warm and touching holiday.
Lynn

12.03.2002

Dear Lynn,

thank you so much for your hopeful thoughts and ideas. Concerning our Transforming Mother, she says she has a hard time with the pains in her body. It is sometimes very hard for her even to go upstairs because her whole body is aching. These feelings occur mostly in her home. She says it is not so much the psychic pain that she suffers from at the moment but that she has had these pains since the suicide of her son. And when she came home from a few days skiing tour with her husband and friends, she didn't go immediately to his grave, as she usually would have done, but instead said to him that she is angry with him, because he left her.

Later on in our conversation I begged her to look for some place in her home that she feels is hers, where she has the feeling that it is filled with lively energies instead of sorrow and despair. And she said this is the room where her son slept as a child and where there are still some books and animals from his childhood. She says there is an joyful atmosphere there and she likes to be there. I supported her in staying there more often and making it her place, so that there is one place in the house that is filled with lightness. I thought to myself, ³Maybe the time will come where it will be necessary to loosen a little bit the rope that ties her to her son.² This was my picture, while talking to her.

11.03.2002

Dear Gisela.

Thanks so much for your email - I can see that the two of you have created a strong barrier against pain, even though it keeps breaking through. Do you

think it is a hopeful or unhelpful sign that the pains began to be more physical than psychic? Will write at length later. In the meantime, good wishes to two courageous fighters. Lynn

16.03.2002

Dear Lynn:

When I think of our Transforming Mother I feel there is a door she doesn't want to go through. This door seems still to be closed. There seems to be a gap between her sorrow and her understanding. She says her son was never sad or depressed but always risking his life- driving his cars very fast, drinking alcohol and having accidents- having a prostitute as a girlfriend. She was always afraid of him not coming home. But her daughter, although she has had difficulties with boyfriends and with her partner now, the father of her child, is doing surprisingly well.

One year ago I got some chance information about the daughter when a colleague told me she had been very depressed and had been on medication for years. He told me that our mother had been medicated for depression too. I was very much astonished when he told me this. She had told me that the early years, when the children were growing up, were happy ones. But she did once tell me that before her son died, while going up the stairs from the garden to her house, she felt that something inside her had broken. After that, she suffered from a bad depression and was also on medication. That was why she gave up her job. But she has had the physical pains ever since her son's death, and she believes they belong to him somehow, and again said she feels that he committed suicide for his parents, but she cannot tell more.

So when I write this I have the feeling that this pain is manifesting in her because maybe she is too afraid to look at it. I feel unsecure how to guide her. There is a very closed part. Maybe we have come to the body story, maybe the sadness has come to rest in her body.

25.03.2002

Dear Gisela:

I am glad you have filled me in on our Transforming Mother, with her aches and pains. Now it seems there is this new history that she is beginning to share with you. Ask her if you can share it with me. She must be very strong to open that door, with such heavy bolts and a big iron key (in my imagination), and very brave to let you look inside. This could be another beginning, but I must confess to having many of those myself. One climbs to the top of the mountain, only to find it is a foothill to another mountain. I continue to hope that I may be allowed to travel in imagination with both of you. With much affection, Lynn

27.03.2002

Dear Lynn:

Today I met with our Transforming Mother and a change had already taken place. She looked much more curious, alive and energetic. She told me that her husband had bought a motor home and that they are planning to travel on weekends and in the summer they will go with a couple they are friends with to the Nordcap. She said the pains had become better since a few days. I don't know what happened, but it developed into a wonderful hour.

I told her that I had talked to you about her pains because I was worried and that we had exchanged thoughts about what it could mean that her pains had become so bad. I said I was afraid that there was something unspoken which was on a deeper level. She listened very attentively and said she felt very happy that I had talked with you about this problem. And I shared with her part of what you had written to me: that your message was "Sometimes it is like walking to the top of a mountain only to find oneself standing at the foothill of the next". And I continued, saying that she should imagine that walking from one mountain top to the next needs much time and energy and one has to be patient. I confessed that I was impatient myself with our progress, but that by receiving your email I had recognized that patience is the one feeling we have to develop. I told her that after all the tears and desperation it seems that she has arrived on top of one mountain and that walking to the next could mean new pains, so maybe it is now time for the body to speak.

Her face was shining like a sun and she said : ³You make me so happy by what you are saying, because I thought I was very fragmented and maybe crazy. I often felt that I was split into three parts: my feelings, my body and my head. Looking at it this way gives me relief, because you say each part of me wants to be seen and heard and that they speak to me in different languages, but nevertheless I am a whole.² I said that the feelings of tiredness and pain in her arms and legs were her body¹'s way of talking about all the work she had done: mourned her son, worked for her marriage, and tried to keep on with her everyday life. I said, "Your body is a loyal servant who only wants to tell you that he is tired, like your soul and head, after so much hard work." Then we said farewell to each other till after Easter and she sends Easter greetings to you.

I realized once more how the underground channels work: you and I exchanged thoughts and concern, I transmitted what we said with her, maybe others who are involved in this story exchanged their thoughts with each other, and all these spoken words and unspoken feelings and thoughts made this process of talking "liveable." So we all accompany each other constantly.

15.06.03

Dear Gisela:

I was telling a neighbor, Susan Tefft, the story of our Transforming Mother last night. The reason is that she is in a supervision group with a social worker who is the mother of an eighteen year old high school student in Amherst who was killed two days ago when his car went out of control. The parents had come from Venezuela; the father teaches sociology at Amherst college. They had been here two years and the boy was just getting adjusted. The whole high school shut down yesterday to give him a memorial and I wondered if we could show our story to Susan, as she was so upset by this event. Please ask our Mother if we may do this.

25.06.2003

Dear Lynn,

I spoke with our Transforming Mother and she told me to give you greetings from her heart and said that she is often thinking of you. She said of course you can give her story to the friend of the other bereaved mother you spoke of in your email. But she said, too, that she believes that her story will not be of help at the moment, because when she remembers back to the time just after the loss no one and nothing could reach her. She said maybe later on it will be of help. She said also that at the moment she doesn't know what to tell this mother.

But she asked me to tell you something else. She had her 50th birthday last week and her sister gave her a small booklet of photographs put together from her family. And she said that going through the booklet she at first didn't realize that there was no photo of her son. And she did not miss him. When she recognized this, she felt guilty. She believes that he will always belong to her heart but that he is not part of her everyday life anymore. She asked me to tell you this. And she said too, that she is now working out the story with her husband, which is a up and down story with many, many struggles. Although it's sometimes very desperate, at least it's open. But she is now leaving for three weeks for a health treatment and wants to be alone. She doesn't want him to visit her, because she needs to protect her time.

29.06.03

Dear Gisela,

Thanks so much for your email and the message from our mother. She seems to be located very much in a story in the present. It does not yet have a worked-out ending, but at least it does not directly involve thoughts about the past. I spoke to Susan Tefft about the piece we three did together, and she is willing to read it, and maybe pass it on to another therapist who knows the woman whose son died. Even though the mother has gone back to Venezuela. I think this story would give heart to the other therapists.

And please give our Transforming Mother my thanks for her wise words in regard to this newly bereaved mother and my admiration for the example she has given to all of us of courage through the tears. With much affection,
Lynn