

THE UNACKNOWLEDGED FAMILY MEMBER: THE ROLE OF ANIMALS IN SYSTEMS

by

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DEDICATION

To Vivia,

You gave me life, laughter and enfolded me with love. It was you who first taught me about the 'golden thread' that weaves its way through every living being, connecting us all in this great universe of life. Your love continues ever to weave its way....

The Little White Horse

*It was under the white moon that I saw him,
The little white horse, with neck arched high in pride.
Lovely his pride, delicate, no taint of self
Staining the unconscious innocence denied
Knowledge of good and evil, burden of days
Of shame crouched beneath the flail of memory.
No past for you, little white horse, no regret,
No future of fear in this silver forest
Only the perfect now in the white moon-dappled ride.*

*A flower-like body fashioned all of light,
For the speed of light, yet momentarily at rest,
Balanced on the sheer knife-edge of perfection;
Of the hill, before the scythe falls, snow in sun,
of the shaken human spirit when God speaks
In His still small voice and for a breath of time
All is hushed; gone in a sigh, that perfection,
Leaving the sharp knife-edge turning slowly in the breast.*

*The raised hoof, the proud poised head, the flowing mane,
The supreme moment of stillness before the flight,
The moment of farewell, of wordless pleading
For remembrance of things lost to earthly sight –
Then the half-turn under the trees, a motion
Fluid as the movement of light on water....
Stay, oh stay in the forest, little white horse...!
He is lost and gone and now I do not know
If it was a little white horse that I saw,
Or only a moonbeam astray in the silver night.*

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SUMMARY

For centuries humans and animals have shared their lives. However, it is only in recent decades that the phenomenon of the human-animal bond and the possible therapeutic implications thereof has begun to be explored. Due to this exploration, many research programmes have sprung up around the world, investigating the implementation of animals as an intervention in various institutions. These programmes have produced overwhelmingly positive and encouraging results. However, the research remains sparse where the significance of a naturally occurring human-animal bond is concerned. From within an ecosystemic worldview, the relationship between humans and animals in the wider family system has not been extensively investigated. This dissertation explores such a relationship, investigating the meanings and experiences within the relationship, and how this relationship and significant systems around it impact one another. The implications and possible therapeutic nature of this type of relationship will be considered.

Key Words

Human-animal bond; ecosystemic worldview; relationship; family system; animals as intervention; meaning and experience; social constructionism; therapeutic nature; significant systems; naturally occurring.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“What is man without beasts? If all the beasts were gone, men would die from great loneliness of spirit, for whatever happens to the beast also happens to man. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the son of earth” - The wisdom of Chief Seattle of the Duwamish Tribe, State of Washington in his letter to President Franklin Pierce, 1855 (Cusack, 1988).

The most difficult things in the world must be accomplished through the easiest. The greatest things in the world must be accomplished through the smallest (Tao Te Ching).

Since time immemorial, human beings and animals have shared this planet, their lives, and eventually their homes, food and friendship. This was a simple, if at times harsh world, where the values of life were clear and never compromised. Within this simplicity human beings and animals shared companionship and comfort.

Over the centuries however, human lives and ways have complexified, until today we search our memories for the time when we were at peace with the world and ourselves. In this searching we usually find that it was in our earliest childhood, when parents were providing touch, comfort, love and acceptance that we had this inner peace. Reviewing what is known of our history as Homo Sapiens, we find that from primeval times it was animals that provided our ancestors with the same priceless gifts. These ancestors at times even attributed healing and magical powers to the animals who shared the earth with them. The concepts and significance ensuing from the human-animal relationship have thus been with us for centuries. Anyone who has ever truly invested in a relationship with a furred, feathered or finned one, will speak of the physiological, psychological and spiritual benefits of such a relationship. The importance of the human-animal relationship has always been felt intuitively by many people, but often scoffed at, and rejected by ‘scientific’, ‘intellectual’ people as being mundane and overly

sentimental. This may be because 'pets' or animals were not considered to be 'good science', and animal life was generally relegated to a lower status than human life (Katcher, in Cusack, 1988). As a result, it is only in recent times that terms such as 'human-animal bond' and 'animal-facilitated therapy' have become known in scientific literature. This may be an indicator that 'science' is catching up to mother earth's ancient wisdom.

During the last two decades however, research on 'animals in therapy' has boomed. This is possibly because once the value of our roots, our earth connection and our interconnectedness to everything in the universe was rediscovered, the appeal and excitement around the potential of animals to reconnect people to life, and give meaning to life was truly grasped. Most of this research has attempted to explore the possible benefits and results of introducing animals into the lives of different disadvantaged groups of people. Much of this research focused on animals as interventions in the lives of the elderly, the handicapped or other disadvantaged groups. With these groups animals are introduced into the environment as part of a programme to improve the quality of life for these people and to provide vitally needed stimulation. Animals with their many wonderful and precious characteristics provide a unique resource to be utilized by such people, especially where traditional treatment modalities have had limited success or have failed completely.

The majority of research programmes involving humans and animals are centered around a cause-effect model where animals are introduced as part of a specific intervention aimed at getting measurable results. Based on this, the researchers aim to measure a specific improvement or outcome of the intervention. It then follows that these programmes which have been introduced into institutions are based on the mechanical, Newtonian worldview of cause and effect, which renders much of this knowledge non-contextual and non-systemic. In such a study it would be difficult to obtain a greater understanding of the interplay of the finer systems and their relevant meanings. Consequently a holistic understanding of the phenomena is lost (Bogdan, 1984; Schwartz, 1982).

As yet, very little research has been undertaken concerning a holistic understanding of the role and meaning of the naturally occurring human-animal bond, and the possible benefits and implications thereof, especially within the wider systems surrounding this relationship. The experience of this relationship by the animal owner, the animal's unique response to the owner, and the fine interplay of systems around this hold many questions that remain unanswered. It is the belief of the researcher that much knowledge and understanding may be gained from exploring this relationship in depth, especially where the meaning of this relationship within the wider family system is concerned.

People share many different realities as to the meaning, value and roles of animals. People who share their homes with animals have different ideas about these values and the status of their animal/s. Many people may claim that their 'pets' are part of the family or think of their animals as 'pseudo-family members'. They may say that the animal does indeed play a significant role within their family system. However, it is the belief of the researcher that as animal owners, especially devoted ones, we do not give full credit to the roles and patterns that the animals in our lives may fulfill. We do not fully see the way in which we as human beings interact with our animal counterparts to contribute in the shaping of our lives, just as we would in any other significant relationship. We are often blind to the interplay of this relationship with the other relationships in our lives. We do not see how often these relationships form an intricate web of meaning and richness in our lives, and how they mould a niche and space for each other.

In an attempt to investigate this belief, the researcher has explored a relationship between a human being and an animal who are deeply committed to one another. This experience and the 'constructed meaning' within this experience will be the focus of this dissertation. Looking at such a relationship it is important to remember that we can never fully know another person's experience of the world. The best that we can do is to interpret the experience of others, in other words, their expressions of their experience as they go about interpreting it for themselves. Whatever sense we have of another person's

inner life, we gain it through their expressions as they experience their life. It is all a matter of scratching different surfaces. To interpret the expressions of others, we have to rely upon our own lived experience and imagination. Giving meaning to this experience requires expression through a creative medium. Many languages may adequately express this meaning, the language of words being one such medium wherein the words may be used as a story to express meaning. It is therefore proposed that the creative medium in this case study is the 'story-form' or 'narrative', which provides a frame of reference and meaning for the lived experience of the human-animal relationship. (Epston, White & Murray, 1992).

Stories are wonderful things with an often magical quality to them, hinting at things unimagined and exploring strange, fascinating places. It is through stories that we are able to gain a sense of the unfolding of the events of our lives through history. Stories enable persons to link aspects of their experience through the dimension of time. Other than stories, there appears to be no other mechanism for the structuring of experience that so captures a sense of lived time, or that can adequately represent a sense of lived time. The narrative form or story-telling tradition thus provides a realm wherein art and science can meet. A convergence of which provides the scientific investigation required of the researcher expressed in the aesthetically patterned journey. In this manner a story can evolve, giving meaning to the shared experiences of the researcher and the participants.

Initially in this dissertation, the researcher delves into the existing literature on the human-animal bond and the use of animals in therapeutic situations, especially when used as a planned intervention. This clearly illustrates the well-mapped areas in the field, as well as those that remain uncharted. This additionally illustrates how much of the research has focused on a Newtonian, linear approach, which splits the 'human-animal bond' into a dualistic model whereby a one-sided approach is considered effective. The chapter includes the work of authors who have begun to consider the systemic nature of human-animal relationships. However, this research is usually within a theoretical systemic structure encompassing systemic concepts such as triangulation within the family, and how this may be functional or pathological. The individual owner's

experience with his/her animal and the complex meaning around such a relationship within the wider family system is not explored in this research.

In the research, much evidence is given to the success of the programmes implemented, but it becomes evident that the questions and curiosities surrounding naturally occurring human-animal relationships remain unanswered. Along with this, the benefits and possible applications of such relationships may be shrouded in uncertainty and are possibly vulnerable to dismissal from those knowledgeable in the field.

As the need for the exploration of this relationship becomes more evident after this discussion, the relevant theoretical premises with which the researcher punctuates the investigation are highlighted. This puts the reader within the realm of the researcher's frame of reference for interpreting the lived experience of the research. The primary concepts within this frame of reference are the ecosystemic and social constructionist epistemologies. These include key concepts such as the participant-observer, cybernetic systems, co-constructions and the concept of 'language and meaning'. These key concepts are used in an effort to illustrate the tools utilized by the researcher in her attempt at understanding the research system. Thereafter, the proposed research design and methods are discussed, which rely strongly on a naturalistic research paradigm. A brief comparison between ecosystemic and positivistic research principles is given, followed by a more detailed description of the naturalistic research principles proposed for this study and the methods applied in the study.

Having paved the way by explicating the researcher's way of thinking and mode of working, the results of the research, or rather the 'story' of the researcher's journey is narrated. The 'beginning' of this human-animal 'relationship' is discussed, and how this story progressed to include the researcher in its midst. The story unfolds to illustrate the interactional patterns between the human and animal members in the relationship system and the impact of this on the larger family system, as well as how these systems fit together and continually co-create one another. A presentation of the emergent themes from the case illustration along with the co-evolved meanings within the research system

is presented. This is done as a complete coevolution and mutual process between researcher and participants, which allows for a construction of the phenomenon of the human-animal bond as a holistic system to be made. Hopefully a shift will be made from a Newtonian epistemology to a participant-observer relationship wherein patterns, which connect and interrelate are focused upon. The nature of the case study is to make the description of the 'human-animal bond' as rich as possible for understanding by other people.

The conclusions, implications and recommendations following from this case illustration are then presented in the final section as the shared journey draws to an end.

CHAPTER 2

THE TIMELESS BOND - AN ANCIENT MEDICINE

“Plants and animals in our environment are like parts of our body. If we eliminate them, we destroy part of ourselves” (Bustad, in Cusack, 1988, p.33).

Introduction

Since before humans could record their lives in written form, humans and animals have roamed the planet and co-existed as an integral part of a finely tuned system. In time, human beings sought to dominate and exploit their co-inhabitants for material gain. Yet from ancient times, there is evidence that certain people were seeing animals as other than convenient commodities (Cusack & Smith, 1984).

Evidence of the human-animal relationship dates back to the stone age and probably beyond, to those individuals who had the vision to see animals as other than food, and rather as meaningful symbols in their daily lives (Levinson in Mallon, 1992). When looking back in history, we find evidence of our ancestors attributing healing and magical powers and often totemic status to the animals who shared the earth with them (Cusack & Smith 1984). Animals are represented in the mythology of these ancients, in the red and black paintings of leaping bison and galloping horses done by Palaeolithic people in the caves of Altamira and Lascaux. These works of art provide evidence that the human-animal bond is not a new discovery and that even those ancient animals provided our ancestors with something of greater value than has perhaps been thought before (Levinson in Mallon, 1992).

From archaeological evidence it seems highly probable that keeping animals and ultimately ‘pets’, arose as a nearly universal human proclivity long before actual domestication took place. However, there must have been social, environmental, and

spiritual factors, which led to the switch from the mere capture and taming of wild animals as early companions to the process of true domestication. The available evidence suggests that the earliest domestication of the dog took place in the Near East during the pre-agricultural Mesolithic period of human cultural development, which followed the end of the last global ice age. This period is characterised in archaeological records by a shift from the semi-nomadic and specialized hunting economies of the ice age, to the more mixed hunter-gatherer economies and relatively settled communities that arose following the retreat of the ice caps. One of the earliest archaeological indicators of the human-animal bond was uncovered in 1976 by Simon Davis who excavated a human skeleton in a tomb in northern Israel. The contents of the find were rather striking. The tomb's skeleton was found clutching the remains of a puppy, indicating that this relationship was affectionate and not merely gastronomic. Davis's poignant find, estimated to be approximately 12 000 years old, suggests that the dog's early, and possibly best destiny was as a friend and companion to humans (Cusack, 1988; Cusack & Smith, 1984; Messent & Serpell, 1981).

Several practical reasons seem to be evident for the initial domestication of animals, such as using large ruminants for food and transport. Sheep, cattle, goats and other herbivorous species would have been utilized for food and eventually some of these, along with horses were used as work animals. However, dogs and cats, being predominantly carnivorous were relatively poor propositions for food. More likely, dogs as early warning devices would have been useful additions to any Mesolithic settlement, given natural dangers and man's warlike tendencies. Although it was a valuable characteristic, it is unlikely that barking on its own could have provided the original stimulus for domestication. The tendency to hunt in co-operative packs, found in several wild canine species, has led to the theory that man's earliest association with wild dogs or wolves took on the form of an opportunistic exploitation by man of the wild dog's hunting skills. However, it seems that the hunting methods of wolves and men were originally incompatible and could not have given rise to an early symbiosis or to domestication (Messent & Serpell, 1981).

One of the most popular theories of the domestication of the dog, is entirely free of utilitarian considerations. Several authors postulate that the earliest domestication arose as a natural, and in some ways inevitable consequence of the universal human tendency to adopt young wild animals as pets. These authors picture young wolf cubs being brought into the villages of early people by children or returning hunters and then being adopted by human females. Under these circumstances the animal might even have acquired a name and status equal to that of other members of the family group (Messent & Serpell, 1981).

The tradition of high-ranking status of animals runs throughout history as evidenced among the Egyptian peoples of old. The Egyptians were one of the ancient civilizations who developed the basic scientific skills of animal husbandry. They are extensively recorded as a nation who held animals in high esteem with a deep reverence for the animals under their care, some of them even being revered as deities, such as the cat. This was especially true for certain of the dynasties during which time the cat was revered so highly, that to kill a cat was an act punishable by death. Throughout the magnificent expanse of Egyptian history animals fulfilled a vital symbolic role in the religion and mysticism of these people. This is illustrated in the numerous representations of gods and deities of animal-form found in their art, jewellery and recorded hieroglyphics, such as the jackal-headed god 'Anubis' and various other animal-headed gods. It was also believed that certain of these 'animal-gods' paved the way to the hereafter and the underworld for the deceased person. These beliefs and traditions were even externalized in massive monuments such as the mighty sphinx on the Giza plain near the pyramids of Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure. Although the exact function and implications of the sphinx are still a mystery, it captures within it the quintessential bond of the human-animal connection in the body of a lion that carries the face of a human (Casson, 1981). Such animalistic and totemic beliefs and traditions may have originated much earlier from the hunter-gatherer stage previously mentioned where pantheism, zoomorphic religions and superstitions were fuelled by a deeply felt dependence upon animals for survival. These traditions and beliefs then continued in the ever growing and complexifying civilizations that followed (Messent & Serpell, 1981).

Centuries later, the native Indians of America prized the horse as one of their most valued and status-dependent possessions. These Indians spent most of their lives on horseback, first as children travelling with their mother in her saddle, and later as warriors riding into hunt and battle. Wealthy and acknowledged members of the tribe would strive towards owning their own herd. With the riding of the horse, the psyche of the plains' people expanded rapidly, as the previously limited horizons of the people on foot became something of the past. Some of the tribes came to look upon the horse with an almost religious awe. The Sioux named the horse 'medicine dog' and the Comanches called it a 'god-dog'. So attached were the Indians to their war-horses that they sang to their steeds and carved effigies to those killed in battle. Most of the tribes used words describing the horse as a mysterious or sacred being (Capps, 1973).

When European explorers first set out to discover the uncharted regions of the world, they encountered innumerable pre-agricultural village-communities overrun with pets of every description. Many of these were wild animals captured and raised in captivity as companions. These Europeans also contributed to the role of animals in other cultures by promoting the horse trade among the Indians and other nations. It would therefore seem that as humans became more and more involved in domesticating animals to satisfy various utilitarian needs, the act of domesticating and interacting with the animals gave a new dimension to humans relationships with these animals. There must also have been a sense of deep personal investment and pride in the domesticating achievements of the husbandman. This endures today in country livestock shows, sheep and gun dog trials, dog shows, and horse riding contests. Investment in financial and emotional spheres would have influenced the bond between humans and animals, and would surely have led to status and pride for the person possessing an animal producing highly prized offspring. Aesthetic appreciation and the consummate rewards of companionship with a horse or dog would of course have added both depth and diversity to the human-animal relationship (Capps, 1973; Messent & Serpell, 1981).

Throughout history then, there appears to be a continuing theme of animals sharing

their lives with people with great benefits ensuing for both at times. At some point in recent history though, the relationship of these animals to human beings was acknowledged as being more than purely utilitarian. The role of animals in documented history, especially relating to the use of animals in a therapeutic milieu, will now be considered.

Documented History

The documented history of using animals in therapeutic treatment settings began at the York Retreat in England, an asylum for the mentally disturbed established in 1792 by a Quaker named William Tuke. Small barnyard animals such as rabbits and poultry lived in the York Retreat's courtyards, while it was the patients' responsibility to take care of them. This daily care of the animals gave the patients purposeful, routine activity that seemed to have a calming effect on them and increased social behaviour, as well as benevolent feelings amongst each other. In contrast to the asylums of the day, which often employed brutal and harsh forms of treatment for the insane, the York Retreat emphasized positive instead of punitive means to control behaviour. Animals were part of the living environment and patients were encouraged to care for them. This was one of the forerunners for the positive reinforcement programmes of today (Brickel, 1981; Cusack & Smith, 1984; Davis 1988; Mallon, 1992; Netting, Wilson & New, 1987).

In 1867, a multibased treatment facility named 'Bethel' was established in Bielefeld, West Germany, as a home and treatment facility for epileptics. This facility was appropriately called 'an institution without walls'. In this environment patients were allowed to interact with and care for birds, cats and dogs. Later horses were introduced in an equestrian programme, followed by other farm animals and a wild-game park. The success of the centre led to the introduction of treatment for other disorders at the centre as well. Animals were an important part of the living environment which made this place uniquely different from other such treatment centres of the time (Cusack & Smith, 1984; Mallon, 1992; Netting et al., 1987).

The trend of using animals in healing extended beyond these institutions: more than 100 years ago, Florence Nightingale recognized that the close relationships between people and pets had a place in nursing practice. In notes on nursing, she suggested that nurses use pets to provide companionship for patients with confining and long-term illnesses (Davis, 1988).

During World War II, animals were introduced as therapeutic agents to convalescing soldiers. In 1942, at the Pawling Air Force Convalescent Hospital in New York, a programme was begun after a serviceman requested a dog to keep him company while he recuperated from his battle wounds. Soon after, other patients requested canine companionship, and many veterans became so attached to their dogs that they were discharged from service along with their dogs. The patients, who were victims of fatigue and physical injury, primarily needed rest and relaxation, and the programme encouraged them to work with various farm animals at the centre's farm as well as engage in academic studies (Cusack & Smith, 1984; Davis, 1988; Mallon, 1992; Netting et al., 1987).

Following World War II, in 1953 a child psychologist by the name of Boris Levinson accidentally discovered the value of using a dog in therapy sessions with a disturbed child. Levinson's dog (Jingles) was with him when the child and mother arrived early for their appointment, and the dog in its excitement bounded onto the child. In prior sessions, the child had remained silent and withdrawn, however in the presence of the dog this all changed and the child became responsive to the dog and to Levinson. The child's response to 'Jingles' caused Levinson to recognize the possible benefit of using a dog as a communication link between therapist and child (Cusack & Smith, 1984).

In the 1960s, Levinson suggested that the use of animals as adjuncts to traditional therapy was only beginning to be explored. Levinson subsequently became a leader in animal-facilitated therapy and first alerted health care professionals to the value of incorporating animals into clinical practice in his 1962 article, "The dog as co-therapist". Levinson documented the successful use of his dog, Jingles, as a communication link or

facilitator during therapy sessions with emotionally disturbed children (Davis, 1988). Levinson's plan for well-designed research projects and his recommendations that animals be carefully trained for psychotherapeutic work influenced others to further explore the possibilities of animal-facilitated therapy (Cusack & Smith, 1984; Netting et al., 1987).

Levinson (1984) based his theory of understanding the process of animals as beneficial in therapy on the axioms of psychoanalysis. According to this theory, a mother nourishes her infant and supplies the infant with the warmth, cuddling and softness that a child associates with love and security. The infant begins to associate soft, pleasing, touch sensations with the availability of security, and the desire for this contact with a soft mother seems to persist throughout adult life. The theory around this being that soft physical contact releases endorphins in the nervous system, which alleviates anxiety and forms the foundation for social attachment. It is thought that therapies based upon touch-contact with either an animal or human have the effect of eliciting this reaction. According to Levinson touch is thus important in therapy, but is a taboo in most occidental social systems. By confining the therapeutic relationship to words, the aim is to differentiate the therapist in the patient's mind from the significant others in the patient's life, around whom conflicts may revolve (Levinson, 1984). Levinson's use of an animal in a therapeutic context therefore involves using the animal as an aid or adjunct to therapy.

Levinson (1984) further explains the touch aspect of the 'animal-in-therapy'. He believes that when animal companions are used as psychotherapeutic adjuncts, they frequently decrease the initial shock incidental to encountering a therapist or beginning a new group therapeutic experience. Petting the companion animal during a session distracts the individual's attention from him/herself. The companion animal, by permitting itself to be petted, gives the individual a relaxed and accepted feeling as if the person were with a friend in an anxiety-provoking situation. Since it is the therapist's animal which is making the patient feel accepted, the patient may experience the therapist as also accepting him/her. By showing him/herself to be a pet owner, the therapist is also

revealing something about him/herself, rendering the self-revelation to not be entirely one-sided.

Levinson (in Brickel, 1981), posits that people have a natural affinity for forming emotional attachments to animals. Citing evidence drawn from art, anthropology, religion and mythology, Levinson states that humanity's universal experience with animals indicates an innate tendency to associate with them and the natural world they represent. In many instances, using an animal as a starting point of discussion the therapist can immediately create a bond between him/herself and the client, building upon this foundation to introduce more pointed inquiries. Children in psychotherapy will often express to a doll or a puppet what they cannot bring themselves to say directly to the therapist, who carries the aura of authority. Children and adults can relate to an animal for the same purpose. Thus, not only is the relationship to the animal an important end in itself, but it can be the means of establishing a relationship with the human therapist. This is done by keeping the therapist at one remove, yet giving the therapist access to all that the patient would like to reveal but does not dare to. This situation can then be explored by the therapist and patient, while contact comfort from the animal keeps the patient's anxiety to a manageable level (Levinson, 1984).

Levinson (1984) stated that in therapy, using animals is a single process in that it introduces a companion animal into the life of a person to enhance the person's emotional well being. Levinson did however see various ways in which the companion animal could be used.

These included the animal,

- As a psychotherapeutic adjunct.
- As the sole therapist.
- As a catalytic agent for change.
- As a means of contact with nature, one's unconscious and the universe.

Some of these alternatives for the 'animal-in-therapy' will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

Later Findings of Animal-Related Therapy

Since Levinson's early work, the literature on human-animal bonding has expanded rapidly. Over the last decade many articles have been written about the benefits pets provide to persons with special needs.

The literature on animals as human companions can be roughly divided into studies on animal ownership that occurred naturally, and studies in which animals have been introduced into various settings as a form of intervention for disadvantaged groups of people. The latter deals largely with individuals in institutionalized settings (e.g., nursing homes; psychiatric wards; and prisons), although some studies have addressed the use of animals in outpatient therapy. Studies on naturally occurring ownership are few in numbers, yet they tend to be stronger methodologically. The majority of these studies include elderly persons, perhaps because elderly people are thought to have pronounced companionship needs (Siegel, 1993).

The introduction of companion animal therapy in residential centres is compatible with the long tradition of other forms of meaningful therapy such as farming, gardening, dance, music and art therapy. The singular difference that distinguishes 'animals-in-therapy' from music, art, dance, or poetry therapies is that in the case of the former, there is a living, responsive, 'co-therapist' (Levinson, in Mallon 1992). Programmes have increasingly developed that place pet-animals with children, handicapped, elderly and other vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. This is due to the belief that companion animals can play an important, even therapeutic role in the lives of certain people (Netting et al., 1987). At this point it would be beneficial to consider the progress that has been reported in the literature concerning the different programmes which are being managed, from which the reader will gain a greater understanding of what has been

accomplished within the field.

While Levinson appeared to be the forerunner in the field, other therapists had reported utilizing animals in their therapy but no other therapist felt that he/she had found any phenomena striking enough to merit reporting in a psychological journal. Levinson's work is therefore the first documentation of this novel approach to treating children (Mallon, 1992). Following Levinson, the early work of Corson and Corson, (in Cusack & Smith, 1984) has done much to bring to light the usefulness of animals in therapeutic situations. Their courage in utilizing animals as therapeutic aides before it was an accepted practice provided enough evidence of the benefits of this approach to justify serious scientific research. This project will be discussed further on in the chapter (Beck & Katcher, in Mallon 1992).

Within the existing literature, it appears that scant attention has been paid to explaining why pet-animals are of therapeutic value, i.e. in diminishing anxiety or attenuating depression. The evidence related is mostly anecdotal, and when theory is addressed, it usually refers to psychoanalytical statements that people have an innate need to affiliate with animals. Brickel (1982) believes Levinson's theory is too general to satisfactorily explain specifically of how and why pets are therapeutic. Brickel suggests a learning orientation as an alternative explanation, where the ability of pet animals to diminish anxiety and provide emotional support can be better understood within an extinction model of learning, specifically within that of competing-response theory. This attention-shift aspect of competing-response theory may explain how pets are of emotional benefit in therapy. Animals divert attention away from an anxiety-generating stimulus that the client faces, which gradually allows for self-monitored exposure to the stimulus, instead of avoidance behaviours. Due to their appealing characteristics, Brickel believes that pet animals are ideally suited for a distraction role. Brickel further feels it is apparent that distraction proves effective in diminishing anxiety and with pet animals as ideal distractors, their beneficial psychological impact on people may theoretically be explained though extinction via shift of attention, and the consequent development of alternate response patterns (Brickel, 1982).

The literature illustrates that animals have been utilized in a variety of settings and functions. They have served the mentally ill and physically handicapped, improved health, enlivened the old, inspired the young, comforted the ill and the dying as well as served every owner and companion to the best of their abilities. In addition to this, they have lightened the burden of many human therapists and inspired hope for future work and research. It is these programmes which will now be considered in greater detail.

Animals and Health

From the research literature it would appear that animals could have a profound influence on our health as human beings. As early as 1929, laboratory experiments showed that canine heartbeats slowed and blood pressure lowered in response to human petting. Additionally, in situations where a dog was subjected to stress or physical discomfort, human contact was able to alleviate the stress and promote relaxation in the animal. Now researchers have confirmed that this is not a one-way effect, but a symbiotic relationship between animals and people. As we benefit the dog, so it benefits us. Friedmann and associates (in Friedmann & Thomas, 1985), studied the effects of the presence of an unfamiliar dog on resting cardiovascular levels in children, and the cardiovascular response to verbalization. The blood pressures and heart rates of 38 children were measured over two four-minute periods. For each child, a dog accompanied the experimenter during one of the two periods. For half of the children the dog was present during the first period, and for the other half, the dog was present during the second period. In each period the child was asked to rest for two minutes and to read aloud for two minutes. The presence of the dog resulted in lowered blood pressures both while the children were resting and while they were reading. The presence of the dog at the beginning of the experimental session was associated with lowered blood pressure throughout the procedure. Even after the dog left the room this effect continued. The dog thus seemed to render the setting less threatening and more friendly and convivial (Friedmann & Thomas, 1985).

Research by Katcher and associates (in Friedmann & Thomas, 1985) demonstrated that this beneficial effect is not exclusive to canines. Fish as well as other animals have a positive effect too. The observing of, as well as the mere presence of an animal has been found to reduce blood pressure in human beings. Beck and Katcher (in Cusack & Smith, 1984) revealed that blood pressure and stress decreased progressively while watching fish swimming in an aquarium. Katcher (in Cusack & Smith, 1984) measured the changes in subject's blood pressure prior to undergoing dental surgery in three different interventions. The interventions involved the subjects watching a fish tank with fish swimming inside it, the subjects looking at a poster, and the subjects watching an empty fish tank. The blood pressure counts of the different interventions were compared and decreases in blood pressure occurred during all three interventions. However, the decrease in blood pressure continued for longer in the situation where fish were present in the tank than in the other two interventions. Similarly, cardiovascular response to verbalization diminished after watching the fish swimming when compared to responses at the beginning of the session of watching the fish. These changes in physical state were most pronounced in subjects who had the most elevated blood pressure. Watching the fish swimming in their tank prior to dental surgery was also an effective means of decreasing patient anxiety, increasing patient compliance, and decreasing perceptions of pain and concomitant increases in blood pressure during the dental procedure (Katcher, 1981; Katcher, in Friedmann & Thomas, 1985; Levinson, 1979; Riddick, 1985).

Riddick (1985), also made use of fish in a study relating to health. She attempted to examine the effects of introducing a new hobby on the health of a sample of non-institutionalized elderly. The hobby that she chose was that of keeping a fish tank. The elderly group of people was divided into three groups. One of the groups was given a fish tank that was initially maintained by the people organizing the project, who paid them weekly visits to do tank maintenance. Another group received routine social visits from the project organizers for the duration of the study to compensate for the presence of the fish tank-maintenance visits given to the experimental group, and the final group did not receive any intervention at all. The study was conducted over a six-month period

during which time the aquarium group seemed to experience significant positive changes. The results of the study support in part what has been suggested in other studies; that is, that contact with animals was noted as having decreased the participant's blood pressure, improving overall leisure satisfaction, and increasing relaxational states. The group who received the visitors did report less loneliness than the aquarium group though. This could be because the people visiting the visitor-group focused specifically on the individuals, whereas the visitors to the aquarium-group focused on the animals and tank maintenance (Friedmann & Thomas, 1985; Riddick, 1985).

Owning a pet appears to stimulate recovery from illness according to research findings at the University of Pennsylvania. Friedmann, Katcher, Lynch, and Thomas (in Friedman & Thomas, 1985) studied factors that affected the well-being of coronary patients. Friedmann and associates (in Cass, 1981) reported that pet ownership in itself is related in some yet unidentified way to the survival of patients who had been hospitalized a year earlier for either angina pectoris or myocardial infarction. They found that the strongest predictor of survival was pet ownership, regardless whether the pet was a dog, cat, fish or iguana! Pet owners were more likely to be alive one year after hospital admission than non-pet owners (Cusack & Smith, 1984; Friedman & Thomas, 1985). Friedmann (in Friedmann & Thomas, 1985) made multiple regression analyses using one-year survival as the dependent variable, with pet ownership and an index of physiological state as the independent variables. The findings suggested that the relationship between pet ownership and survival is probably independent of differences in health status and physiological state between pet owners and non-pet owners. Of 53 pet owners, 50 were alive and well one year after hospitalization compared to only 17 out of 39 non-pet owners who were alive one year after hospitalization (Cusack & Smith, 1984; Riddick, 1995). Friedmann and Thomas (1985) suggested that pet ownership should be further investigated as a therapeutic aid for patients discharged with these diagnosed conditions. In a further study, Friedmann (in Cass, 1981; Cusack & Smith, 1984; Riddick, 1995), conducted a survey of 100 pet-owning hospital patients to ascertain the effects of pet ownership during hospitalisation. She concluded that the owners required frequent reassurance concerning their pet's welfare during their stay in hospital, but that the pets

continued to provide a sense of being needed and an impetus for quick recovery for the hospitalized owner.

Animals appear to decrease the owner's loneliness and depression by providing a source of companionship, an impetus for nurturance, and a source of meaningful daily activities. They also decrease the owner's anxiety and sympathetic nervous system arousal by providing a source of contact comfort, a relaxing focus for attention, and a feeling of safety. In addition, an animal can help its owner improve or maintain physical fitness by providing an impetus for exercise. Ory and Goldberg (1983), provided important evidence suggesting that the health benefits of pets are dependent on the owner's attachment to the pet. In a study of life satisfaction in elderly women, they found that happiness was higher, and depression lower in pet owners who are attached to their pets than in people who are not attached to their pets, or non-pet owners. It was further found that this attachment often depended on financial security, in the sense that more finances allowed this relationship to be more fulfilling as the owner was not burdened by the financial concerns of the animal 'consuming' extra funds that were not necessarily available. Freedom to concentrate on the relationship without financial constraints obviously made it more beneficial than it would otherwise have been (Friedmann & Thomas, 1985; Watson & Weinstein, 1993).

The work of Sam and Elizabeth O' Leary Corson (in Cusack, 1988) in the 1970s also came about unexpectedly when they were researching dog behaviour at Ohio State University hospital. The kennels were within earshot of the adolescent ward, and the patients hearing the dogs bark, broke their self-imposed silence and asked if they might be allowed to play with the animals. The Corsons selected the patients that were the most withdrawn and the least communicative and studied the effects that interacting with the dogs had on them. The results showed that 47 of the 50 patients showed improvement and many were eventually discharged from the hospital. Improvements were mostly seen in communication skills and social interaction. The Corsons extended their work to the Castle nursing home in Millersburg, Ohio and obtained similar results. Interaction with the animals promoted self-reliance and increased responsibility among the patients, many

of whom had previously been entirely unmotivated. The animals also facilitated social interaction between the residents and between the residents and the staff (in Cusack & Smith, 1984; in Friedman & Thomas, 1985). Corson and Corson (in Riddick, 1985) concluded that introducing dogs to the residents of the nursing home resulted in increased social interactions and activity as well as improved morale.

Brickel's study (in Cusack & Smith, 1984) of reality orientation with nursing home cat mascots is also of interest. When Brickel (1981) assessed the therapeutic role of cat mascots on a hospital-based geriatric population, mascots were observed as giving patients pleasure, stimulating patient responsiveness, and providing reality therapy (Riddick, 1985). Siegel (1993) did research on the utilization of physician services among elderly persons (65 years and older) living in southern California, and who were enrolled with a health maintenance organization. Controlling for demographic characteristics and health status at baseline, subjects who owned pets reported fewer doctor contacts over a one-year period than subjects who did not own pets. The staff agreed that the presence of the animals contributed to the patients' keeping in touch with the real world, i.e. when the patients kept food for the cats, it suggested that the cats had been incorporated into the patient's own reality.

Institutions such as alcoholic rehabilitation centres have also implemented such programmes. The animal's role as something to care for probably accounts for some of the successful use of dogs at alcoholic rehabilitation centres. The Abbey, a treatment centre in Illinois, adopted a stray mixed-breed dog named 'Tramp'. Tramp was an important part of the programme and acted as an inspiration and friend to the patients. The Guenster house, a halfway house for alcoholics in Connecticut has several mascot dogs and assigns each new guest a puppy as part of the treatment programme. Many of the dogs eventually return home with the patients, thus providing an ongoing impetus for recovery (Cusack & Smith, 1984).

In Messent's (in Friedmann & Thomas, 1985) observations of people walking their dogs, these people experienced more social contacts and conversations, and engaged in

conversations of longer duration than lone walkers. Pets can also provide important links to friends and relatives in the outside world for hospitalized patients. Membership in a network of mutual responsibility is an important element of social support. Frequently, people who live alone or who lose reciprocity in their relationships with others become depressed, feel unneeded, and suffer loss of self-esteem. A lack of social support increases response to stressors, and increased stress responses lead to diminution of the body's ability to fight infections and resist disease. Thus social support decreases the impact of stress on the body and lessens the likelihood of the development of new diseases or exacerbation of old ones (Riddick, 1985).

Animals, Institutions and the Elderly

Many people, due to their circumstances, become very lonely during old age. This may be the result of isolation due to illness or simply because old people are so often forgotten in our fast moving and youth-orientated society. Consequently, numerous studies have been done on the use of animals in enriching the lives of the elderly and the institutionalized. Some of the more prominent ones will be considered here.

Out-Patient Studies

In an early and classical study by Mugford and M'Comisky in Great Britain in 1975, the therapeutic effects of pet animals on an outpatient population was evaluated. This well-controlled study looked at the influence of pet birds on the emotional well-being of elderly people. Thirty elderly pensioners were selected ranging in age from 75-81 years of age. The researchers divided these elderly persons into five groups, and the criterion for the study was that the people had to be living alone. The first two groups were given a budgerigar (a small Australian parrot), due to the ease of care and adaptability to most home environments of this bird. The second two groups were given a begonia houseplant. The final control group received neither fauna nor flora. As an additional factor, the presence of a television was taken into account as the researchers theorized

that a pet might be less important to television owners, the reason for this being that television affects interaction with society as a whole and thus perceptions of loneliness. Extensive follow-up over a five month period revealed significant improvement in the measure of self-esteem and emotional well-being in those given the budgies. The overall evaluation showed that budgie ownership had a positive effect. The 12 individuals who had received the birds showed marked improvement in attitudes toward other people and psychological health. Further analysis revealed no significant difference between the plant groups and the control group, and the presence of television made no difference. The birds became a significant part of the pensioners' conversation and enhanced their social lives with friends and neighbours. Follow-up a year and a half later revealed that the recipients still had the pets and were taking good care of them (Cusack & Smith, 1984; Friedman & Thomas, 1985; McCulloch, 1981; Riddick, 1985).

Many older people have discovered that animal companions satisfy some of their greatest needs. 'Pets' restore order to these people's lives and form an important link between the owner and the community of caring people. Companionship with an animal may actually increase a senior citizen's lifespan (Cusack & Smith, 1984). Pet animals facilitate rapport between people and otherwise enrich the treatment milieu. They increase social interaction, provide comfort and support, and catalyse person to person interactions which render them appropriate to counteracting the type of problems which the elderly experience. They are a useful vehicle for fostering positive interpersonal relationships (Brickel, 1981).

Inpatient Studies

Pets have the capacity to modify the environment and the people in it. People perceive situations in which animals are present as safer and more benign. Beck, Seraydarian and Hunter (1986) hypothesized that animals (birds) make an environment seem less threatening. Consequently, psychiatric inpatients who met for group therapy and other activities in a room containing birds, attended the sessions more faithfully, participated more readily in the activities, and benefited from the therapy more than a group who met

without the birds present. The therapists who conducted therapy with the animals present seemed less threatening, and the patients often revealed more of themselves. Just as the therapist seemed less forbidding and more humane to the patient, others perceive the patient with an animal as more approachable or treatable (Beck et al., 1986). For the group therapeutic process to have any value, the patient must attend and participate in the group, as the presence of animals has been shown to facilitate participation within the group setting. In the study, the bird group had a greater rate of attendance at group meetings and showed more frequent participation than did the non-bird group. A surprising result was that half of the treatment group was discharged before the study was completed which was not anticipated. Perhaps the benefits of animal contact provided the additional healing necessary to help these patients become eligible for discharge. Further replications of the study are required to confirm the hypothesis (Beck et al., 1986).

Lynn Millican (Millican, 1995), a psychiatric nurse working in an acute, all-male admitting ward in a psychiatric hospital had some remarkable results with her dog 'Toolie'. Toolie is a female 'registered pet therapist' who accidentally went into the ward one day with the nurse. The dog apparently made such an indelible impression on all the patients, that she was brought in to visit them on a weekly basis. It was reported that many patients with chronic schizophrenia who usually required much prompting to come out of their own inner world, leaped into reality and gravitated toward Toolie. The mood of patients who were angry or agitated often seemed to soften in the dog's presence. Patients suffering from paranoia, who usually maintained a certain distance from others, rushed to Toolie to be close to her, and some of the patients would even kiss her. Toolie willingly kissed them all back. Being a Labrador Retriever, normal, professional nursing conduct did not apply to Toolie. Toolie seemed able to provide the unconditional acceptance that many chronic, institutionalized patients never received. The dog did not care whether a patient was responding to inner stimuli or monotonously reciting the atomic table, she seemed to be listening with complete attentiveness, evidenced by the wag in her tail, holding up her paw, and following where the patients led. Patients who were withdrawn were often eager to walk around the grounds with the

dog and the owner. This pleasant non-threatening atmosphere seemed to create a milieu that really fostered meaningful exchange, intervention, and learning for the patients.

Pet Visitation Studies

Incorporating animals in therapy programmes in long-term care facilities alleviates some of the negative effects of institutionalization. A decline in an individual's health is often the primary cause for moving to an institution. Entering an institution can have a negative effect on a person's sense of wellbeing, as persons residing in long term care facilities frequently feel isolated and rejected by society. It appears that the relationship between the elderly and animals has a positive effect on the physical and mental health of these people (Fick, 1992).

According to Bustad (in Fick, 1992), animals provide humans with a measure of acceptance, adoration, attention, forgiveness and unconditional love. Fick (1992), conducted a study to determine the effect of the presence or absence of a dog on the frequency and types of interactions among nursing home residents during a socialization group. A dog was introduced into the room while the group was in session. It was observed that the verbal interactions between subjects increased significantly in the presence of the dog. During one session, the presence of the dog stimulated conversation about pets, this included personal stories about the pets that these people had owned. The stories were continued even after the dog had left the group. These results and observations suggest that the presence of the dog contributed toward a comfortable environment that was conducive to the therapeutic goal of facilitating social interactions within the group.

A study done by Robb, Boyd and Pristach (in Cusack & Smith, 1984) aimed at ascertaining the effectiveness of certain objects as catalysts for social behaviour included the use of a puppy. The population consisted of elderly institutionalized patients at the Veterans Administration Medical Centre in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Robb hypothesized that the introduced object's degree of animation, or capacity for life would have a direct

correlation to that object's ability to impact social change. A wine bottle was selected, along with an inanimate but interesting stimulus, such as a flowering plant, which is alive but not capable of motion and a caged puppy to represent the object with full animation. These three items were introduced separately into the dayroom of one unit of the medical centre for ninety minutes each on two separate days. The subjects in the study were all chronically ill elderly patients. With the introduction of the puppy a dramatic increase in social behaviour became evident. Two of the patients who routinely uttered repetitive, monotonous and illogical statements stopped their inappropriate remarks in the presence of the puppy. Invasion of personal space increased as clients moved to get closer to the puppy, but no hostility resulted. During the other two intervention phases of the study, inappropriate comments and one-word remarks were much more evident than during the puppy phase (Cusack & Smith, 1984).

In an another programme, 'pet therapy' utilizing a well-trained dog, was introduced to the residents and staff of a retirement-nursing care community. The residents were examined prior to, during, and after the introduction of the dog to the facility. The residents served as their own controls. The residents were also compared to another similar group of residents who did not have exposure to the dog, but were treated identically in all other respects. Twenty-three participants were observed and rated by nurses and therapists. Significant improvement was noted in 15 of the patients who interacted with the pets particularly in the areas of activity-involvement, verbal communication, socialisation with non-nursing personnel, socialisation with other residents and behaviour at meal times. Many of the residents involved in the study had difficulty in coming to terms with their existence and who they were, which often made communication extremely difficult. The dog proved to be invaluable in breaking through these communication barriers. A dramatic example of this, is of one woman who first thought that the dog had been brought in by the staff to kill her. She was usually hostile toward staff and claimed to 'see' them digging her grave at night. Eventually, she began petting the dog, and in time recovered from her shock so that her ideas of the dog and herself began to change. Over a six to eight month period a drastic change took place in the woman. Where she was previously withdrawn, confused and at times hostile, she

became so well integrated that she began helping newcomers to the community adjust to their unfamiliar situation (Cusack & Smith, 1984).

Pet-facilitated programmes have been receiving an increasing amount of attention from researchers. However, most of the studies done so far have been primarily concerned with the potential benefits of animal companionship for the elderly, institutionalized, handicapped and other isolated population groups. Research reports document a range of positive effects for such people, including that pets foster sociability, enhance morale, fulfil needs to provide nurturance and to be nurtured, reduce reliance on psychomotor medication and provide significant forms of sensory stimulation (Savishinsky, 1992).

Animals and the Ill

Cancer Patients

Muschel (1984) conducted a pilot study to investigate the possible benefits of animal visitations for terminally ill cancer patients in a nursing home. One focus of the study was the examination of the potential of this treatment modality to reduce anxiety and despair in institutionalized cancer patients. A second focus was to examine whether particular personality features made it easier for certain patients to establish contact with animals in such a way as to gain a sense of well-being. The arrangements for the study were organized via the pet therapy programme at the A.S.P.C.A. of New York City. Four to six volunteers, including Muschel, brought kittens, cats, puppies and dogs to a nursing facility for terminally ill cancer patients. At this nursing facility, all active medical intervention for patients' cancer had ceased, and the goal of the treatment was to create a comfortable and pain-free life. The patients were told that the purpose of the study was to see how they felt about having the animals with them.

The patients were selected on the basis of their stated interest and they had to have a level of health that allowed them to participate in the programme. If they could move around they came to the central recreation room to be with the animals, otherwise a

volunteer remained with the animal at the patient's bedside. The programme ran for ten weeks with one-and-a-half-hour sessions each week where the animals were present. The measures used in this study were a questionnaire, five cards from the Thematic Apperception Test (T.A.T.), pictures of people interacting with animals taken from magazines, and observations of each patient's behaviour. At the conclusion of the programme, it was found that the response of the patients had been overwhelmingly positive. Twelve of the 15 patients apparently stated that the animals lessened their despair, loneliness, isolation and fears (Muschel, 1984).

This study suggests that animals may help individuals in ways people are not always able to. Therapy using this approach appears to increase the comfort and adaptation of the dying patient. People who live and work with dying patients often bring their own concerns and fears about death to the patient, whereas animals never avoid the dying patient's emotions and do not interfere with the patient's attempt to come to terms with mortality. The animal's quiet, accepting and nurturing presence strengthens and frees the patient to resolve his/her own final experiences successfully. The animals remain present, accepting and available to the patient's emotional needs despite the difficulty of the situation, and a fruitful relationship is often developed. It would appear therefore, that animals are effective in helping patients work through their anxiety and despair, as well as gain a sense of well being. Muschel (1984) ascertains that pet ownership is often the most prominent indicator of survival in ill patients, regardless of their degree of social interaction or the lack thereof. Muschel further suggests that the presence of animals influences people in ways that are separate from and in addition to human relationships.

Muschel (1984) suggests that the exploration of the contribution of stress as one of many factors leading to the development of cancer and the potential of animal companionship to reduce this stress would be of value. The study showed that animal contact helped patients to more easily move through the stages of grieving as delineated by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. Those who seemed to benefit most from the presence of animals displayed more warmth, humour, and creativity, as well as a greater capacity for enjoyment and empathy. They seemed able to bond and identify with the animals which

enhanced intimacy and provided the space to work through their problems.

The presence of animals in homes for terminally ill also offers benefits to those who provide care for the patient. Stress and emotional exhaustion is often experienced by people helping the dying which may be diminished by contact with these nurturing creatures. An additional benefit is that such therapy programmes provide a fruitful role and happy life for homeless animals who might otherwise be put down (Muschel, 1984).

Hospice Residents

Chinner and Dalziel (1991) conducted a study concerning the use of animals as a therapeutic aid in a hospice. In this exploratory study an attempt was made to determine what attitudinal, behavioural, and interactive changes would be exhibited by terminally ill patients and their care-givers when a miniature poodle was introduced as a resident in a hospice. The study attempted to determine whether animals in the hospice had a beneficial or negative effect on hospice personnel and patients.

The sample in Chinner and Dalziel's (1991) study consisted of 14 patients and 15 staff members. The data collection for the study included three phases, i.e. a pre-test, post-test and follow-up phase. During the three phases the investigators made use of interviews, observations and videotape to collect data. The data was mainly collected in the communal room where interaction between the participants and the poodle could take place. During the periods of observation in the communal room, investigators took notes and made video recordings of the interactions between patients, poodle and staff. From the results it was found that the project was a partial success.

The programme was successful in terms of patient-staff interaction, which increased in frequency, and patient-visitor relationships, which were eased and facilitated by the poodle's presence. The dog appeared to provide temporary happiness, comfort, and entertainment for both patients and care-givers. However, contrary to current theory related to use of animals in institutions, it was found that patients who frequently felt

isolated or alone had less affection for the poodle than did other patients. It was surmised that this was a 'distancing reaction', a mechanism for those particular patients to cope with dying. It was also found that the participants who were merely in the presence of the animal and did not form any attachment to it did not experience the same benefits as those participants who formed a strong attachment to the animal. In other words, the people who created a unique meaning around the presence of the animal enjoyed greater benefits from their interaction with the animal. Otherwise, no significant negative effects were reported. The study showed that such projects can be conducted viably within a hospice environment, and the project was generally considered to be beneficial for the hospice, its nursing staff, and its patients (Chinner & Dalziel, 1991; Watson & Weinstein, 1993).

The Youth and Animals

Consciously or unconsciously, most people and especially children sense that there is a connecting thread of life running through the universe. It is this living thread that connects us to our own species, to other animals, and indeed to all living things (Levinson, 1984, Mallon, 1992). This sensitivity of children to animals was first noted by Levinson (in Mallon, 1992) who documented his experience of utilizing companion animals as aides in the treatment of children. He postulated that the use of animal companions for children encouraged mutual support among the children and led to a quicker social and emotional adjustment to prevailing circumstances. Another prominent feature that emerged from Levinson's work was that of increased responsibility being fostered with children in relation to animals. Mallon (1992) continued this work and proposed that acceptance of responsibility for the care of a pet eventually leads to an acceptance of responsibility which will promote meaningful, satisfying human relationships.

Following Levinson (1984), there has been an increase in the use of pets and farm animals in therapy, especially for children who may suffer from isolation and loneliness.

In what was initially known as pet-facilitated therapy, but what has recently been redefined as animal-facilitated therapy, animals have found a place in various therapeutic situations. Professionals in the child and youth care field are experiencing the value of using animals as therapeutic aids in treating problems like loneliness or complex disorders such as severe autism. Love, affection, touch and nurturance of animals are seen as positive steps in treating troubled young people to enable them to function in meaningful roles in society. Assisting young people in developing positive relationships with animals and their environment can be a novel, exciting and useful means of addressing the needs of children in youth care (Katcher & Beck, in Mallon, 1992). One such centre where much work of this nature takes place is Green Chimneys Farm.

Green Chimneys Farm

Utilizing farm animals is a means to reconnect troubled children to emotional health, it is also a way to reconnect the thread of life which can be damaged when a child is separated from the family and placed in an institutional setting. Since Levinson's early work with children, various programmes have been implemented where animals and children are allowed to interact and include children with greatly differing problems needs. Much of this research involving animals with children has taken place at Green Chimneys Farm (Mallon, 1992; Mallon, 1994a; 1994b; Ross, 1983).

Green Chimneys Farm is a 150-acre farm and residential treatment centre where emotionally disturbed and learning-disabled children are treated. The farm is a voluntary, multi-service agency dedicated to the development of basic educational and life skills for children and their families in order to restore and strengthen their emotional health and well being. The residential treatment centre component of the agency on the farm is a home for girls and boys between the ages of six and 14 years who are experiencing significant behavioural and academic difficulties, and considered not productive in their former environments. Ultimately, the aim is to return the children to their own communities (Mallon, 1994a).

The Green Chimneys Farm is one of the few child-care agencies where, if children speak of their therapists as if they were dogs, no one gets offended, because this might really be the case. In a research project at Green Chimneys, Mallon (1994a) asked, "What happens when a dog is placed in the living unit of a residential treatment centre for children?" To bring 'the farm' into the dormitories, a dog was placed in each of the dormitories. Mallon discovered that the children related to the dog as their confidant. Since animals cannot speak, the interactions between the dogs and the children were truly confidential (Mallon, 1994a). The findings of the study were divided in the sense that there were benefits as well as drawbacks. The benefits included companionship, acceptance, non-judgemental love, and the fact that the children experienced the dog as their confidant. These led to the children forming therapeutic relationships and exhibiting nurturing responses towards the animals and the other children. The drawbacks primarily included incidences of animal-abuse in the dormitories of the older boys, and a negative perception and attitude of the animals by a small percentage of the staff. It appears from the study that animals, particularly dogs, are especially effective when utilized as adjunct therapist with children because of their interactive, affectionate, non-judgemental and social natures. The dormitory dogs provided 24 hour companionship, and were available to everyone including the staff, most of whom were very positive towards them (Mallon, 1992).

No human can possibly offer a child more general acceptance than the faithful dog. Child-care staff at the farm overwhelmingly believed that a greater understanding of the child's need for cuddling, love and affection by animals or human beings would lead to more rapid healing in many wounded children (Mallon, 1994a). That both the children and the staff had established a bond or relationship with the dogs in their dormitories was evident in the interviews that were conducted for this study. Every child or adult spoke about his/her unique relationship with their dog. It was discovered that certain 'dialogues' went on between the dog and the children, which the workers were not privy to. They knew that the children talked to the dogs when they were angry, upset, or mad, but they had no idea about the content of these conversations which were 'private moments' between dog and child. Sometimes, only after the children established a

relationship with the dog, were they able to begin relating to other people.

One of the children related the following: "When the children go off and they start screaming or when the girls fight or something, he barks at them and you know it's like he's telling them not to fight. One thing about dogs is that they don't like a lot of noise. When it gets too noisy they get confused and they start to go crazy and he starts barking until the confusion stops" (Mallon, 1994a, p.96). The most striking report came from one of the housekeepers who described one of the children's relationships to the dog: "We have a little boy who never goes on home visits, he can't because his mother is too troubled. But on those weekends when the other children go home and he stays behind, usually he's really sad, but he kind of adopts Roxanne. He sits with her and takes special care of her, almost like she is his special person. Even though he usually has to share Roxanne with all the other children during the week, during these weekends, he feels that she is here especially for him" (Mallon, 1994a, p.96).

Staff strongly agreed that having a dog in the dormitory taught responsibility and provided opportunities for developing nurturing experiences. One of the biggest concerns as mentioned previously, was that of animal abuse especially where children had themselves experienced abuse. The staff felt that the wards should be screened and that some wards, especially with older, aggressive children should not be given animals unsupervised (Mallon, 1994a).

Companion animals clearly provide social, emotional and physical benefits for children. Many animals, but particularly dogs with their highly interactive nature, can fill the human need for responsive acceptance and loyalty. Having sensitivities, needs and personalities of their own, animals can truly serve as companions, friends, confidants, playmates and sometimes even scapegoats. The animals can further be the agents for development of rapport within a relationship and create the scope for therapeutic change (Ross, 1983). Animals may provide a partial solution to the problems of alleviating stress and feelings of deprivation in children, who are vulnerable especially in an institutional setting, because the right animal and person can accept each other completely. Kidd and

Kidd (in Mallon, 1994a), emphasize the importance of the fit between person and animal. If there is no real sense of fit, then there is no real benefit. The person may acquire a sense of guilt over the failure of the selected animal to meet his/her unrealistic expectations, or resentment may result over the amount and kind of care which the animal requires. This can lead to innocent animals being abandoned or destroyed (Mallon, 1994a).

Mallon (1994b) did a further exploratory study at Green Chimneys wherein he investigated the experiences of the children in relating to the outdoor farm animals. Based on previous research, Mallon was interested in examining the efficacy of farm animals as therapeutic aides in the daily environment of children living at the treatment centre. In his article "Cow as Co-therapist", Mallon asks whether a cow can aid or substitute for the interaction between the child and the therapist. He also asks whether this animal-child relationship is similar to the one between child and therapist. Mallon reports findings that indicate that the children utilized the farm animals as they would utilize the services of a therapist. Respondents indicated that they spoke to the animals without fear that what they said would be repeated elsewhere, that they visited the animals to feel better when they felt sad or angry, and that they learned about nurturing and caring for other living things (Mallon, 1994b).

Several salient findings emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data of Mallon's (1994a; 1994b) research:

- Definite healing and therapeutic effects of visiting the farm were observed.
- The animals provided a place where the children could 'take time out', and feel better when upset or angry.
- The animals were used as a metaphor for emotions and experiences.
- The deep nature of the relationship between humans and animals, with its elements of empathy and identification was revealed where children identified with their favourite farm animal.
- Confirmation that the human need for touch and contact-comfort is essential, and that the farm animals provided many opportunities in which the children could nurture

them was also corroborated by the staff.

- It seemed that children intuitively felt that the farm was a therapeutic and healing context. That communication between children and animals was present and meaningful was evident (Mallon, 1994a; 1994b).

As evidenced by Mallon (1994a;1994b), an organization using animals can record some very simple data without using elaborate research designs, which can significantly improve knowledge within the field. Recording whether or not the immediate emotional impact of an animal translates into lasting therapeutic change would be valuable information (Mallon, 1992). Beck & Katcher (in Mallon, 1992, p.64), cite this need stating, “there is a critical need for continued and augmented exploration of the emotional and health value of nurturing living things.” Interacting with and caring for animals provides a context where learning and practising nurturance can take place that is equally accessible to boys and girls in terms of gender role expectations. Because such interaction and care is gender-neutral, it might prove to be a particularly useful training ground for the development of nurturance in boys (Ross, 1983).

Dolphins, Dogs and Autistic Children

In a research project named ‘Project In-reach’, an exploration of the interaction between autistic children and Atlantic bottle-nosed dolphins was done. After observing neurologically impaired children responding positively to free-swimming dolphins, the researchers wanted to investigate whether autistic children could be prompted to communicate with dolphins. Although dolphins are an unusual species for such a project, they exhibit excellent character traits for the task. Dolphins, being extremely social in nature and temperament, respond readily to distress calls from their own species and human beings. It is believed that they possess exceptional intelligence and can communicate in a sophisticated language expressed in clicking sounds. Dolphins tend to form strong bonds with their trainers, and in the absence of their own kind seek contact with human beings. Due to these positive traits they were chosen as a species for the project (Cusack & Smith, 1984).

Eight children from the Southford Society for Autistic Children were selected to interact with three dolphins from Wometco Seaquarium. During the interaction session the dolphins exhibited amazing gentleness and patience with the children. Several children started responded to the dolphins with clicking sounds and spontaneous play with no prompting from any other person. During the time that followed these interventions, the children's families reported experiencing much more joy and relaxation than they had previously, and that the effects of the interaction with the dolphins lasted several weeks (Cusack & Smith, 1984).

The poor rate of improvement of autistic children from conventional education or psychotherapeutic interventions underscores the need to develop innovative approaches for treating this disorder. A study by Redefer and Goodman (1989) explored the novel intervention of dogs with autistic children. Animals and especially dogs possess potential assets that human beings often lack. Dogs are an ideal intervention to combat the low sensory and affective arousal levels of autistic children as they provide a powerful multisensory stimulus. They provide strong, clear sounds, a vivid visual impression, a special smell, and are a novelty to touch. Dogs can also be demanding, in that they are likely to follow, lick or bark at a child that rejects their company, and as these simple, repetitive, non-verbal actions are easy to decode the child is usually aware of what the dog is demanding (Redefer & Goodman, 1989).

Redefer and Goodman (1989) made an effort to systematically study the changes in the social behaviour of the autistic children, both during and after exposure to the planned animal intervention. The study suggests that a dog, when used as a component in therapy, can have a strong impact on the behaviour of seriously withdrawn children. It was found that a significant increase in prosocial behaviour with a parallel decrease in self-absorption occurred with the introduction of a friendly dog. In the dog's presence the children's autistic behaviour such as hand posturing, humming, the utterance of clicking noises, the spinning of objects, repetitive jumping and roaming actually decreased. Instead, they displayed more socially appropriate behaviours, such as joining

the therapist in simple games, initiating activities by giving the therapist balloons to blow up and balls to throw. They also reached up for hugs, and frequently imitated the therapist's actions.

The behavioural changes that occurred were of a more socially acceptable nature, in that the interactions with the children became more productive and pleasurable. At post-treatment, with no dog present, and at follow-up, when there was neither dog nor familiar therapist, the children still performed better at baseline than what they initially performed. Deterioration of performance was however evident in subsequent follow-ups. It would appear that this intervention would need to be continued over the long term for more permanent results to ensue (Redefer & Goodman, 1989).

The researchers could not explain exactly why or what impressions the dog made that served to 'prime' the handicapped children. Perhaps the children were better able to participate and enjoy social interactions with the dog as a stimulus. The presence of the dog with its novelty, and sensory and perceptual allure all seemed to heighten the affective or impulsive state of the children, which the therapist was trying to modulate and direct. Redefer and Goodman (1989) state, "We believe the use of a dog makes theoretical sense and especially in this sample, increased social connectedness and expressiveness at least over a limited period in a limited setting" (p.465).

Undoubtedly the presence of a dog in school and at therapy sessions was contextually novel. Sometimes, certain of the children became over-aroused, such as one little girl who when first introduced to the dog ran about the room laughing and screaming. The therapist had to step in to lead the happily excited child to play more quietly with the dog by touching and brushing it (Redefer & Goodman, 1989). This illustrates how the therapist cannot merely be a 'conduit' for the children's emotions, but must play an active role in teaching the children how to communicate and play with the dog, sustain activity and broaden their repertoire of responses. It is therefore a symbiotic, interactive relationship.

Equestrian Therapy for the Handicapped

Equestrian therapy for the handicapped is a French innovation adopted in Britain and gaining widespread acceptance all over the world. Therapy using horses has also spread to include work with the mentally ill. In the USA there are approximately 160 accredited institutions that allow a physically handicapped child a chance to ride and associate with horses. For children confined to a wheelchair, sitting on a horse for once allows them to be higher than their peers, giving their self-image and confidence a boost. Children who have limited self-esteem and who feel powerless over their lives, see the horse as a strong, dominant animal. Humans have historically had a deep and enduring relationship with the horse, and riding gives these children, who often feel helpless, a sense of freedom and relief from the everyday routine they must endure. With the aid of an animal a child can compete with other children in sporting events. Finally, the physical condition required to ride the horse provides incentive for the child to continue the tedious regimen of exercising with weights and pulleys required for their physical health (Cusack & Smith, 1984; Mallon, 1994b).

A formal study in Equestrian therapy was conducted by Natalie Bieber (in Cusack & Smith, 1984) at the handicapped unit of the Village School in North Haven, Connecticut. The children's ages varied from six to 17 years. Their ailments included diseases such as spina bifida and cerebral palsy. The programme was instituted three days a week during a five week summer session, with one day riding a pony or in a cart, and two days in the classroom using the association with the horses as a springboard for learning. A form of physical exercise is therefore provided for even the most passive rider, which becomes exciting physical therapy when there is the motivation to actively take control of the horse it.

Bieber (in Cusack & Smith, 1984) remarks that physical therapists which she has worked with often state that she accomplished more with their patients in 15 minutes of fun on a horse than they did in one hour of hard work in a clinical setting. Bieber says

the following about her work with the children: "Confined to their wheelchairs, they spend many hours in front of a T.V., watching the beautiful people. What do the beautiful people do? Very often they ride horses or are involved in horse related activities. By the association with horses, I was hoping to transform my kids into the beautiful people" (Bieber, in Cusack & Smith, 1984, p.200). Riding encourages disabled and special needs children to feel good about themselves. They engage in an activity that not even all non-handicapped children can perform, and they achieve success because well-designed programmes are structured to include a success factor. All this translates to improved self-confidence, self-esteem and ego strength. She believes the result is a happier and healthier child.

Results of the study based upon subjective evaluations by the staff at the village school indicated that the programme significantly benefited all but four of the children. The children were stimulated physically, socially and intellectually, and one child who was severely withdrawn and retarded, showed early signs of communication when prompted by a picture of a horse (Cusack & Smith, 1984).

'Pet – Therapy' as Metaphor for Self-Dialogue

Rochberg and Halton (1985) in their research aimed to illustrate how pets, specifically cats, can become significant partners in a therapeutic 'family metaphor'. The relationships made possible by the cats provide an externalized means for self-dialogue because the mind lives in perpetual conversation (Cooley, in Rochberg & Halton, 1985). Through building a 'conversation of gesture' and 'significant symbols', the cat and the child carry on a socializing dialogue which becomes part of the child's reality and ultimately part of the 'family meaning'.

Rochberg and Halton (1985), in giving an account of a pet therapy programme at the Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago, discuss such self-dialogues. As part of the adjunctive therapy programme, an arrangement was made to bring some of the adolescent in-patients to the 'Treehouse Animal Foundation' once a week as volunteers. Treehouse

is a shelter devoted to the care of neglected, injured, or abused cats, not normally taken in by city or other animal shelters.

A treehouse is a place where, for a time at least, the children can dwell in their own world and play at being adults. Both in-patients and staff became Treehouse volunteers, spending the first hour of the weekly session playing with and grooming the cats, and the second hour handling administrative chores. It was hoped that here a unique environment would be provided in which patients could engage in a self-dialogue of emotions through play-activities with cats. The hypothesis was that, by allowing the patients to assume the role of caretakers, and by taking on the identity and responsibilities of volunteers in the community instead of patients removed from community participation, the Treehouse milieu could act as a significant experience to improve patients' sense of self worth. The researchers hoped to show how these adolescent psychiatric in-patients could construct a 'therapeutic family' through which they could establish a therapeutic self-dialogue (Rochberg & Halton, 1985).

'Pets' often become the vehicle of communication between patients, as well as a personified companion who 'listens' to what the individual patient says or communicates. It is acceptable to hug, pet or kiss an animal, but signs of affection to friends are more limited. It is understandable that the primary reasons for keeping a pet seem to be companionship. They provide a means for gestural and verbal communication which enables us to carry on a self-dialogue of emotions. They are not merely our pets for emotional expression, but also real channels that enable us to express our emotions in a dialogue freed from the frictions that beset normal human interactions. Cats in particular possess the qualities of softness and warmth in their own inherent character, and can therefore be the emotional 'outlet' of the domestic sphere par excellence (Rochberg & Halton, 1985).

This project allowed the children to shift their focus from a negative social status as mental patients to a positive role as volunteers for an institution highly regarded both in the community and Chicago at large. An equally important socializing factor was the

way in which the Treehouse experience was brought back to the hospital. It was noted that specific patients selected specific cats, which seemed to mirror their own personal and emotional issues. It was noted that a cat chosen by a specific patient presented with avoidant behaviour, and how by choosing this particular cat, the patient seemed to be selecting an appropriate reflection of herself. It later became apparent that this patient had selected a very disturbed cat, and that her devotion to it and the relationship she cultivated with it proved to be a positive therapeutic experience for both her and the cat (Rochberg & Halton, 1985). Parallels were seen in the patients' relationships with their cats and the relationships that they had with other people. Some patients struggled to maintain an ongoing self-dialogue of emotions with a particular cat, but they did take pride in their increasing knowledge of administrative work, of grooming and understanding of cat behaviour (Rochberg & Halton, 1985).

It became clear during the programme that a certain level of functioning was necessary for the programme to be therapeutic. The ability to develop a 'favourite', to single out, identify with and maintain a relationship with a cat for some period of time seemed to be an indicator of a patient's capacity for social interaction. More importantly this should perhaps be considered as one of the goals of the therapy itself. A programme such as this illustrates the value of a concrete, social, praxis-orientated therapy, and how it might contribute to other treatment programmes for patients. It is evident that important personal issues come into play, and how they can be raised to the level of articulation through the self-dialogues that such activities make possible (Rochberg & Halton, 1985).

The Primary Benefits of Animal-Related Therapy for Children

Although the value of a child's association with a pet has long been recognized, an examination of recent literature, both lay and professional, suggests that the potential role of animals in our lives, particularly with children, is possibly even more significant than previously thought. Blue (1986), ascertains that the following facets are the most important of the benefits in relationships between animals and children:

- The animals give love, attachment and comfort, and 'pets' can provide many opportunities for the nurturance of love and affection which children so sorely need. Humans and animals need to be touched, pets are sometimes 'living security blankets' to a child. The emotional support offered by an animal companion can serve the young child's normal need for what is termed a 'transitional object'.
- Sensorimotor and non-verbal learning are developed from interaction with animals. Young children learn primarily through direct experience of their environment. Thus sensorimotor learning derived from the interaction with animals is invaluable.
- Responsibility and a sense of competence is encouraged by contact with animals. As children become older, they are capable of attaining a growing sense of autonomy and competence by caring for an animal.
- Learning about life, death and grief are aspects of life that are highlighted by relationships with animals. Pets can help instruct children on both an intellectual and emotional level in their understanding of the meaning of life, death and grief. An extensive study of 507 adolescents in Minnesota reports that over half had lost their special pet and only two of these young people reported feeling indifferent to the loss. A similar study conducted with 135 school children in Scotland found that 44% had pets that had died. Two thirds of these children expressed profound grief at their loss (Mallon, 1992).
- Therapeutic benefits for psychological and physical health can be seen. A growing body of scientific evidence indicates that companion-animals can provide therapeutic benefits to both psychological and physical health.
- Nurturing humanness, ecological awareness and ethical responsibility is encouraged by relationships with animals. Although animal-rights is currently a controversial topic, the questions surrounding our place in the universe and upholding the value of co-operating with nature and not merely conquering or dominating, it are basic to many aspects of life, to the development of critical inquiry and to a sense of ethical responsibility. When in close contact with animals, observing and caring for them, children can learn in a practical way about the concept of the interdependence of all living things, which may lead to practices such as conservation (Arehart-Treichel, 1982; Levinson, 1980).

- Loyalty, trust and respect are found in many of these relationships.
- Because animals are living beings, they tend to be more beneficial to the children than play therapy.
- The arena for work with animals is much broader than the office.
- The animals have a 24 hour availability (Levinson, 1980).

While it is well established in the literature that animals can help children to deal with feelings of isolation, poor self-esteem and depression, there are many secondary effects that may go unnoticed (Beck & Katcher, 1983; Levinson, 1972). Touching and petting animals helps to alleviate stress in the child or adolescent and at the same time they receive unconditional acceptance. The interaction between the animal and the child elicits immediate emotional reactions within the child, such as feelings of happiness and joy. In relating to the therapist through animals, people with difficulties sometimes find a vehicle of expression which allows them to communicate in ways that were previously blocked to them (Hoelscher & Garfat, 1993).

Animals in Prisons

There has been limited research focusing on 'pet facilitated therapy' in prisons. There are many academics, prison experts and politicians who often claim that little in the way of rehabilitation of prisoners seems to be working effectively these days (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991).

The rationale of why working with animals could foster a change within prisoners is partly derived from the work of Margaret Mead (in Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991). Mead was perhaps one of the pioneers to hypothesize that if children torture small animals and get away with it, this could be a precursor to their potential for harming their fellow humans later in life. Indeed, empirical validation of earlier studies have shown a strong correlation with the triad of behaviours including persistent enuresis, fire setting and animal cruelty associated with dangerous aggressions later in adult life (Moneymaker

& Strimple, 1991).

A number of successful programmes using animals as therapeutic agents in prison have been established. One of these is the pet therapy program at the Oakwood Forensic Centre in Lima, Ohio (formerly known as the Lima State hospital for the criminally insane). This facility has inmate patients who have been adjudicated as criminally insane, most of whom are chronically depressed or suicidal and they are housed in a maximum-security wing known as the Oakwood Forensic Centre. David Lee a psychiatric social worker, initiated the idea in the early 1970s that perhaps a few parakeets and a fish aquarium might provide the inmates with a means of helping themselves through some very difficult times of depression, loneliness and hostility. With the implementation of this idea, outstanding results with depressed patients were seen. As a result, animals have been donated to the project, and at present five of the ten wards are involved in the pet therapy program. A follow-up showed that the medication level of the experimental group declined to half that of the control group, and the incidence of violence and suicide attempts declined significantly (Lee, in Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991).

In another programme at the Purdy Treatment Centre for women, a maximum-security prison in Washington State, Leo Bustad and colleagues of the Washington University helped found the people-pet-partnership program (in Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991). The programme has come a long way since its inception back in 1979. Its purpose was to establish community college classroom instruction for women prisoners in canine husbandry and behaviour, in obedience training, as well as customised training designed to meet the special needs of handicapped people. With the long period of training completed, the trainer's experience a time of sorrow when the animals leave to go to a new home. This 'tearing away' creates considerable anxiety for the dog and the trainer, but the women know that they have contributed to a very worthy cause. They have fostered within themselves a positive self-image, gained better self-control, and at the same time they have learned a vocational skill that could help them find employment upon their release. Most importantly, the programme has given women a new

perspective of live and taught them to have consideration for others who cannot help themselves. By training dogs to help other people the women have shown their honesty, devotion, commitment to and love of their fellow human beings, animals and themselves (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991).

The large number of wild horses in Colorado gave rise to the third programme involving prison inmates. Agents working in conjunction with the Federal Bureau of Land Management rounded up the horses in order to have them bought at public auctions at a reasonable cost. Unfortunately, the Bureau of Land Management rounded up far more wild horses than could be auctioned. Since all the horses were wild, NOWAH (National Organization for Wild American Horses) stepped in to take control of the situation. In conjunction with the National Humane Association in Canon City, Colorado, NOWAH became interested in having the horses trained by prisoners in a state penitentiary so that they could be more adoptable. Dubbed the wild horse prison project, inmates were given both classroom and field instruction in all aspects of horsemanship from husbandry and training, to handling and appropriate veterinary and farrier skills. In addition, the inmates learnt some other very important skills that prisons do not generally provide an atmosphere for, namely, compassion, commitment, discipline in learning the finer points of a skill or a trade and teamwork. The skills that these men were being introduced to were qualities they rarely identified with on the outside, but for now they were essential in order to get through the programme and hopefully would stay with them once released. Again, as in the other programmes, the responsibility and compassion in caring for another living creature has indicated the usefulness of such programs in bringing about a change in the behaviour of these men from an otherwise hostile, non-committed prisoner to a responsible mature adult (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991).

PAL (People Animals and Love) is an organization dedicated to bringing people and pets together, giving both a new lease on life. PAL initiated a programme at the Lorton Correctional facility in Lorton, Virginia in March 1983, that is committed to the full rehabilitation and successful return to the community of all its residents. The programme at the facility provided a unique opportunity for individuals who had committed heinous

crimes to perhaps redeem themselves or at least to show a different side of themselves. The introduction of animals to this particular institution was a very unusual one since no programme of its kind had ever been allowed. The opportunity to show love and compassion to an animal could have lasting effects on what was previously a hardened criminal. Since its inception, the programme has given the inmates an opportunity to learn a vocational trade while improving their quality of life by showing compassion and understanding to another living being (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991).

Since the inception of the programme PAL has trained approximately 100 inmates in the Assistant Laboratory Animal Technician course based on the same course design structured by the American Association of Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS). This programme teaches the fundamentals of animal care in the laboratory. The course is taught for two hours per week over a 26 week period. The inmate is provided an animal as a pet while in the programme. It is his responsibility to continually monitor the animal to insure it is healthy and to treat it with compassion and understanding. The time spent with the animal, other members in the program, attending the classroom instruction and learning a skill or vocation, was found to modify the behaviour of formerly violent and often malicious persons to a compassionate and caring, responsible individuals (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991).

Men who did well and became eligible for work release were helped to find a job in a local lab, humane society or animal hospital (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991). The programme aims at behaviour modification of formerly violent individuals and works well for the participants in giving them a new lease on life. One of the inmates commented on the programme, "This course is the most solid thing they have here to prepare you to return to society" (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991, p.144.) The men who have completed the program have for the most part shown considerable change in their outlook toward others, their sense of self-worth, and their hope of achieving a better life. This seems to be confirmed by the decreased altercations and problem behaviour among the Lorton inmates. There are not often opportunities to obtain such skills within a prison such as at Lorton. Many admitted that the animal they worked with instilled in them

compassion, love and responsibility towards other living creatures. This type of programme also spares homeless animals from being put down (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991).

A Systemic Perspective

Researcher Judy Harris (in Cusack & Smith, 1984) writes, “that for a family systems therapist to ignore the importance of the functions and roles of a pet is to miss a significant aspect of the human experience. As a child growing up with a dog, I never doubted that he was a valued part of the family. Yet it never occurred to me that our interactions had any significance beyond that of owner to pet. Of course, I was aware of the warmth, fun, acceptance and love that Prince provided – but I derided myself for the devotion” (p.40).

One does not have to observe or talk to family members long, before it is clear that pets have a very special role in the family. Cain (1985) conducted research to explore the pet’s position in the family according to the theoretical orientation of Murray Bowen. Bowen (in Cain, 1985) conceptualizes the family as a system, i.e. family members are all interrelated and comprise, by their relationships as well as by their individual existences a system or a larger whole. He also worked extensively with the concept of triangulation. Triangle theory conceptualizes how the members of the triangle relate to each other in an orderly series of alliances and rejections within the family. In 1965, he wrote that the family’s emotional system “at times may include members of the extended family network and even non-relatives and pets” (Bowen, in Cain, 1985, p.123). Pets like humans can be triangled into a family system to relieve an uncomfortable situation. In terms of pets, triangles usually provide for a display of affection, anger or distancing. It is important that family therapists have knowledge of the significant role of pets as family members in order to conceptualize the family as a whole.

Cain’s (1985) study focused on the human-companion animal bond in military

communities in the United States. He did a national survey of mobile military families who had pets. The survey's aim was to look at a pet's role in the quality of life of service families as well as the pet's role in community health. He sent out a 32-item questionnaire based on the concepts of Bowen's theory. The survey achieved a 64% return rate which was interpreted as evidence that families considered their pets to be very important and useful, an average answer rate is usually 35-40% for such a questionnaire. The following hypotheses were confirmed: 44% of respondents said that pets were sometimes triangled in, 8% said always. Others reported examples of using the pet in a triangle. They purposely put the pet in the backyard during conflict because the pet always got upset and tried to interfere. Respondents also reported that they spoke loudly to a pet about matters of difficulty or conflict so that other members of the family could hear them. The survey further showed that the degree of loss experienced by the death of an animal was significant. Of the respondents 94% reported extreme loss or pain when an animal died, or was lost, of 68% felt that pets were full family members, 30% saw them as close friends, and 96% felt that they were very important (Cain, 1985).

In this research it was found that the pets fulfilled the following important functions for the families:

- They provided something to care for.
- They kept the family busy.
- They provided something to touch and watch.
- A feeling of safety and security resulted from the presence of the animal.
- They were the stimulus for increased exercise.
- The animal was a guaranteed companion

It is important for family therapists to realize how important pets are in a family structure. Pets often provide much insight on family interaction and are an important source of information about the organization or disorganization found within a family (Cain, 1985).

Family systems therapist, Entin (1986), also perceived that human-animal companion relationships offer unique insights into the emotional processes of the family. Entin (1986) states that it is remarkable that man's age-old relationship with animals has only

recently been the subject of psychological inquiry. Working from the Bowen perspective, Entin perceives the animal as a 'member of the family', and considers the role of pets in the family and how these relationships may be revealed in family photographs. Anthropologist Jay Ruby (in Entin, 1986) suggests that in some way pets and the role of snapshots are similar in our lives, in that both are often taken for granted. Entin's interest is in the area of the human-companion animal bond from the perspective of a family therapist. He focuses on the manifold ways in which 'pets' function as part of the emotional processes of the family. Family photo albums are thus useful sources of information for him in understanding these relationships and provide him with clues concerning the interactions within the family. In one family's many photographs, the father is seen hugging the children and the mother hugging the dog. A few months after the photo was taken the parent's split up. The father won a legal battle for joint custody of the children and the mother kept the dog (Entin, 1986; Levinson, 1984).

Entin (1986) sees these as complex metaphorical relationships, and another lens through which to explore and understand the human family emotional processes. Entin asks, "What is the metaphor that the pet represents for the pet owners?" The pet owner's behaviour can provide a startling amount of information that goes far beyond the general inferences one might make on the basis of his/her preference for a specific breed of pet. To the attuned observer "it is possible to reach conclusions about the most profound and intimate aspects of a persons life when one looks at his specific relationship with his specific pet" (Simon, in Entin, 1986, p.13).

Entin (1986), when speaking on systems theory says that pets function as part of the emotional processes of the family. They become triangulated and become objects of the family projection process, because they are part of the focus of emotional intensity and reactivity in the family. The extent to which a family pet becomes an important part of the family emotional process indicates the extent to which it is a pet-focused family. Whatever is chosen by a family to be photographed and recorded in the family photo album reflects the ideals, traditions and values of the family. However, Entin cautions against over-interpretation of these facts. The timing of introduction of pets into the

family system, perhaps during a crisis, is indicative of the way families handle change and deal with emotional issues. Therefore, the role of the family pet can be extremely important in further understanding family processes.

The sensitivity of the family therapist toward the special needs of pet-owning families can improve communication between the parties as well as facilitate therapy. The issues surrounding pet ownership allow for opportunities to foster closer dialogue between the therapist and family members and within the family system (Bustad & Hines, 1981). Family therapy focusing on systems theory is based on principles of interdependence in communication and ecology, and attempts to deepen the therapist's understanding of families by expanding upon the ways they organize themselves and relate to social forces. Redefining concepts about the family unit, therapist's today no longer need feel inhibited about including the family pet in treatment. Sometimes it is essential to the success of the therapy for the pet to participate in the therapy (Mackler, 1982).

Factors Influencing the Effectivity of Animals as Therapeutic Aids

In the United States pet ownership is widespread. Approximately 60% of American families share their homes with one or more companion animal. There is no single explanation of why such companionship seems to rank high in the needs of people. In childhood or old age people tend to be more vulnerable and loneliness often follows an extensive life change, such as death of a family member, divorce or departure of someone. Other positives such as pleasure, fun, exercise, security, protection, responsibility and respect for life all seem to be significant factors in keeping a companion animal (Cain, 1985).

Companionship is the most researched aspect of the health-benefits of keeping pets. The companionship provided by a pet often leads to decreased loneliness and improvements in psychological and physiological status. Additionally, the presence of a pet provides 'social lubrication', which increases contacts with others. This is

particularly crucial for individuals lacking support from family or close friends. Pets can help people who have lost contact with others through bereavement or emotional dysfunction to regain contact with the world. Once contact with an animal is established, it is easier to enter into relationships with other people. The special kinds of relationships people have with animals and the non-judgemental nature of the animals make relationships with pets less threatening than those with people. Pets provide a crucial source of touch for individuals who would otherwise be without this sensory input. Touching an animal decreases an individual's anxiety and physiological arousal and can have positive health effects (Cusack & Smith, 1984).

The characteristics of pet animals, which render them appealing, are the same traits that make them useful in achieving mental health treatment goals. Smaller pets such as insects, reptiles, fish and rodents are fascinating to watch. They provide entertainment and respite from daily problems. In addition, larger pets such as birds, cats or dogs provide this and more in that they serve as companions. They provide constant, unquestioning sources of comfort and affection. Animals may instil in their caretakers a sense of responsibility and self-esteem. An animal can also enrich feelings of self-esteem and act as a facilitator and catalyst for interpersonal relationships. Pets provide relationships in which a person can choose the depth of involvement and can dictate most of the rules with little or no risk of rejection or retaliation. Unconditional attachment and loyalty of a pet is unreservedly given with no demands, and its behaviour is predictable and non-judgemental in human terms. Pets provide an unbounded friendship that is a source of warmth and companionship and are less competitive and more dependent than what humans generally tend to be (Brickel, 1981; Cain, 1985; Cass, 1981; McCulloch, 1981).

A further important aspect of the relationship with animals that appears to be beneficial is that of play. Play may be an important part of human-companion animal bond because it greatly increases the potential for contact between the pet and the owner. Above all, the non-competitive qualities of pet-orientated play provide an absorbing and harmless form of recreation for human beings of all ages (McCulloch, 1981). Play emerges in the

literature as a significant contributing factor of contact with pets, and its influence on human health has been vastly underrated. It is strongly suspected that the element of play is directly related to promoting a sense of humour. Other writers have spoken eloquently about the role of humour in coping with illness. In his book, "Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient - Reflections on Healing and Regeneration", Norman Cousins (in McCulloch, 1981) described the role of laughter in helping him to reduce the amount of pain that he experienced. He further said that his sedimentation rate, a measure of the severe inflammatory process that affected him, was actually reduced by his systematic programme of introducing humour into his rehabilitation.

If humour has a positive influence on illness and depression, then the humour experienced from watching and playing with an animal may be one of the pet's most significant contributions to human health. Lynch (in McCulloch, 1981, p.115) has noted the need for companionship, especially during chronic illness and depression, in his book "The Broken Heart: the Medical Consequences of Loneliness". In this work he states that, "...the lack of human companionship, the sudden loss of love, and chronic human loneliness are significant contributors to serious disease and premature death". He alludes to the importance of the quality of interaction, not just the presence of someone else in the life of someone who is ill, as being an essential ingredient for the person's recovery. He describes the need for 'dialogue' between human beings as a critical element in maintaining physical and emotional well being. Pets may indeed have a neutralizing effect on conflict through their ability to distract and entertain through play, promote laughter and prompt an inner dialogue (McCulloch, 1981).

Non-verbal Communication

The most important factor contributing to the success of the programmes already mentioned could possibly be the nature of non-verbal communication. This is a powerful mode of communication and thus far has not been considered. It is important to take note of its influence on the results that have been discussed.

Samuel Corson (in Cusack & Smith, 1984) has observed that people in general and even those in the health-care professions, who may have the best training, noblest motives and the kindest intentions, tend to send negative non-verbal signals to the sick, the infirm, the aged, and the handicapped. In turn this may lead to a vicious cycle of social isolation, mistrust, suspicion, and feelings of intense inadequacy. A chain of physiological and psychosocial events is then stimulated that may further exert debilitating effects on the patients, the patient-staff interactions and hinder the restoration of balance in these people's lives (Corson & O'Leary Corson, 1981; Cusack & Smith, 1984).

One method of breaking this vicious cycle of mutual negative reinforcement is the introduction of carefully selected well-trained animals. Animals, particularly dogs and cats, have long played a humanizing and socializing role in human interactions. Animals, particularly well-trained dogs, offer an effective means to break this cycle creating a more congenial and sociable atmosphere in an institution or even in the home. Pets provide a means of positive non-verbal communication that is reassuring and comforting. A dog does not care if its master is beautiful, young or healthy. It will accept a tender stroke from a hand that is aged and trembling, as enthusiastically as from that of a young and able athlete. A dog puts no conditions on the affection it shows. Love is not withheld or denied if the owner does not perform in a satisfactory manner. The love that an animal gives is free of strings and conditions. It is open, honest and uncomplicated, and not subject to change (Corson & O'Leary Corson, 1981; Cusack & Smith, 1984).

Non-verbal communication is just as potent when coming from animals. Dogs and cats have only a limited repertoire of vocalizations and certainly nothing comparable to the repertoire of human beings. Nevertheless, the ability of these animals to communicate with their owners by non-vocal means, is and probably always has been very important in the pet-owner relationship. Both cats and dogs employ body postures and various expressive behaviours that owners believe they can readily interpret, and both have a relatively large repertoire of visual social signals compared with many wild species. Facial expressions, changes in the posture of the body, positioning of the ears and tail or

the direction of gaze can all be used to express a wide range of different emotional states. Perin (1981) expressed this about a particularly loved animal, "...[she] expressed her anxiety not only when I had a headache or a chill but also when I was feeling downhearted. She would demonstrate her sympathy by a less cheerful gait than usual, and with subdued demeanour would keep strictly to heel, gazing up at me continually"(p.68).

The Animal Owner's Animal as Therapist

When the animal owner's companion animal is the sole therapeutic agent, the nature and intensity of the owner's relationship with the animal will determine its therapeutic effect. When the companion animal is functioning as sole therapist, we assume that the individual has self-directing capacities which can emerge through interacting with the animal companion, and that there is meaningful communication taking place between master and companion animal (Levinson, 1984).

The companion animal can help the individual express him/herself more easily, release emotions, and overcome inhibitions. In this manner the companion animal provides the individual with a chance to grow within the relationship at his/her own pace, exerting no coercion or pressure, and having no expectations to be complied with or rebelled against. Whatever insight the owner obtains in this way is entirely due to his/her own input and activity. One must also understand what a dog symbolizes to its owner. The wag of the tail is a means of communication; it manifests affection and acceptance. It signals to the owner, "I'm happy you're here". Touching the animal brings contact-comfort and an upsurge of loving feelings in the owner and, to judge by its behaviour, in the animal as well. The dog's caring for the owner means to the latter that he/she is unconditionally accepted whether he/she is right or wrong. All these elements are the hallmarks of a good therapist, which is why dogs are so successful in that role (Levinson, 1984).

The owner may often talk to the animal while petting it, perhaps verbalizing as at no other time his/her fears and anxieties. In so doing emotions are embodied in clearly seen,

concrete images and ideas, which can be more easily handled than vague fears. An owner who has a close relationship with a companion animal feels that the animal understands and accepts him/her with all his/her foibles and 'hang-ups', and cares enough about the owner to defend him/her at all times. The owner may often feel that the companion animal shares emotions with him/her, and is communicating its regard toward the owner by affectionate behaviour. This non-verbal communication of 'unconditional positive regard' (Rogers, in Levinson, 1984), which the person may never have received from a human being can bring about a positive change where the person experiences this for the first time

Freud (in Katcher, 1981, p.46) summed up the experience of his relationship with his dog poignantly in his response to a letter from Princess George of Greece, who had written a book about chow dogs (Freud, himself had a chow). "I love it, it is so moving, genuine and true...It really explains why anyone can love an animal like Topsy (the Princess's dog) or Jo-fi (Freud's dog) with such extraordinary intensity: affection without ambivalence, the simplicity of a life free from the almost unbearable conflicts of civilization, the beauty of existence complete in itself. And yet, despite all divergence in the organic development, that feeling of an intimate affinity, of an undisputed solidarity. Often when stroking Jo-fi I have caught myself humming a melody which, unmusical as I am, I can't help recognizing as an aria from 'Don Giovanni: A bond of friendship unites us both...'"

Conclusion

Most of us can recall a time (often as children) when the devoted companionship of a loyal dog or the purring of an affectionate cat gave us more comfort than most modern tonics. The animal fulfilled our needs in a way that no human could. As we matured, we thought our devotion to the pet was childish or silly. The paradox is that animal facilitated therapy is the most modern of medicines, yet it is as ancient as the art of healing itself. Dating back to that twilight time in prehistory, when humans found that

animals were not simply sources of food or competitors for prey, but friends and companions, a timeless bond was established (Cusack & Smith, 1984; Davis, 1988).

This bond has largely been forgotten by many of us, and in our rushed society we bear the consequences of this...“We are no longer entitled to feel, but have to think and evaluate. There is nothing to hold onto and hold sacred...our estrangement from life is compounded by the fact that we have alienated ourselves not only from our inner beings, but also from our natural allies, the animals. In desperation, we look to the various therapies that have sprung up around us like weeds, hoping for an answer to our soul’s malaise. However, we find that we are chasing a shadow. The peace we so desperately seek eludes us. We find ourselves grabbing onto a chimera” (Levinson, in Cusack, 1988, p.34).

With the ‘rediscovery’ of the human-animal bond, there has been an increasing awareness of this bond and its benefits in the field of psychology. It is clear though that research activities on the human-animal companion bond and animal facilitated therapy are still in a relatively early stage. It is evident that more research is needed to better understand the implications of this bond and the nature of animal facilitated therapy (Beck & Katcher, 1983; 1984; Mallon 1992; McCulloch, 1984). The reported evidence accumulating through observation and experience asserts that pets serve as mediators, facilitators, catalysts, and co-therapists, and seem to enrich our lives in numerous ways just by being their own furry, feathered or finned selves (Cass, 1981; Cusack & Smith, 1984; McCulloch, 1981).

Today, animal-facilitated therapy is used in many different acute and chronic treatment settings (Davis, 1988). However, the roles which animals fill in the daily systems we encounter and the embedded meanings within these are still poorly understood. The researcher will attempt to explore these further during the course of the dissertation. Chapter 3 will consider the theoretical constructs on which this exploration will be based.

CHAPTER 3

AN ECOSYSTEMIC WORLD VIEW

“The lens through which we human beings view reality has been locked into myopic focus for so long, it has rusted into place. We tend to view the physical through the physical, forgetting the spiritual and the eternal. With eyes caught in a tangle of revered cobwebs, we rarely notice even a single tree. The forest, for most of us has become but a legend...It does not require a Sherlock Homes to note that our problems are rooted in our methods of thinking. And our thinking itself is rooted in assumptions so archaic it is doubtful whether they have received any critical evaluation since the last Ice Age. The problems of an analogous acorn society would not, in the end, be resolved by improving acorn methods of thinking, but by the beautiful and terrible bursting asunder that unleashes the magnificent power of the implicit oak” (Carey, 1988, p.14).

Introduction

The following chapter's focus will centre on the ecosystemic epistemology. An exploration will be made of second-order cybernetics and social constructionism. The convergence of which flows into post-modernism where 'experience' and 'meaning systems' are seen to emerge from the interactions and language which people share with each other in their daily lives. The chapter begins with the fundamentals of epistemology, and how this one word weaves its way through ecosystemic epistemology, until the chapter draws to a close in considering the stories people tell of their world and the meanings these stories hold for them.

Epistemology

The realm of epistemology may appear deceptively simple from the definitions of epistemology. Defined as the way in which a person processes information, and the grounds held for certain knowledge, simplicity seems to be in order (Keeney, 1979). Epistemology has further been defined as the conceptual grid or filter through which a person interprets the behaviour presented to him/her. In this light, epistemology is known as a person's 'frame of reference' (Keeney, 1983). This is because a person's epistemology is centered around the rules of operation that govern an individual's cognition, it actually refers to the basic premises underlying any and all action and cognition. To become aware of one's epistemology is a vitally important thing, not only for a researcher, but also in every day life. It is to this end that epistemology is in fact not as simple as it seems. Fostering and extending this type of awareness in our lives is no easy feat, and is especially important when sharing and 'interpreting' the experience of other living beings as they relate this experience to the researcher. Our epistemologies colour and mould all meaning that we attach to our experiences. Accordingly, one's epistemology leads to a particular way of arranging observed data. Bateson (in Keeney, 1979) commented on this: "All descriptions are based on theories of how to make descriptions. You cannot claim to have no epistemology...and every description is based upon, and contains implicitly, a theory of how to describe" (p.118). It can therefore be said, that one's epistemology is one's way of knowing and making sense of the world (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982). If we are not aware of how we make sense of our world, then important information concerning the world we live in may be lost.

It is to this understanding of the importance and the overwhelming influence that epistemology has on shaping our perceptions, that this chapter becomes necessary. It is of further importance that the researcher's epistemology is made explicit. This epistemology will now be looked at in greater depth, and will guide the way in understanding the unique experiential world of the human-animal bond and the implications thereof.

Ecosystemic Epistemology

Ecosystemic epistemology springs forth from an ecological approach, and is founded largely on the principles of human ecology and systems theory, emphasizing relationships and whole systems. Ecology is the broadest view for looking at all possible systems, levels of systems, and relationships among systems. Looking at human ecology, the person-environment context constitutes the totality of relationships among individuals and their environment. Thus in its entirety, the environmental context forms what Keeney (1979) terms, a 'unitary interactive system'. In such a synergistic system, the interactions of the system components have a greater total effect than the sum of their individual effects, and the relationships between parts of the human ecosystem are not static but in a constant state of flux (Stachowiak & Briggs, 1984). Ecosystemic thinking is therefore relational and complex in focus, approaching the complexity inherent in human lives and inherent in the human-animal relationship (Jasnoski, 1984).

The essence of ecological premises is reflected in the following words: "On an aesthetic level, ecology is based upon the fundamental doctrine that all things in nature are complexly, but systematically, interrelated – morally, mentally, and physically" (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982, p.9). Roszak (in Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982) proposes that this idea can be extended even further, whereby the earth, including ourselves and our culture, can be imagined as a single evolving system of life - a metaphor for thinking of the planet and its systems as a whole organism. This idea is personified in the metaphors of the American Indians, who see the whole earth as a single organism, with the rivers as her veins and the soil as her flesh (Keeney, 1984). Capra (1982) echoes this belief, stating, "...the earth, then, is a living system; it functions not just *like* an organism but actually seems to *be* an organism – Gaia, a living planetary being, her properties and activities cannot be predicted from the sum of her parts. Every one of her tissues is linked to every other tissue and all of them are mutually interdependent, her many pathways of communication are highly complex and nonlinear; her form has evolved over billions of years and continues to evolve... [this] like many other aspects of the new

paradigm...reflect a profound ecological awareness that is ultimately spiritual” (p.308). It is the belief of the writer that if we as humans could truly understand and live according to this expression of interconnectedness, then we would no longer need many explanatory theories about life. As matters stand though we need to remind ourselves of the interconnectedness of all living things.

One of the fundamental premises in the ecosystemic approach, is the shift from interpreting events or behaviour in terms of linear, cause-and-effect sequences to conceptualizing the same behaviour as emanating from a reciprocally causal system of interaction. In contrast to a linear epistemology, this approach attunes its ‘lenses’ to focus on interrelation, complexity and context (Keeney, 1979; Stachowiak & Briggs, 1984). Ecosystemic epistemology is concerned with patterns of relationship that are described by metaphors of form and pattern. Watts (in Keeney, 1979) suggested that we tend to describe our world in terms of ‘nouns’ and ‘things’, instead of ‘processes’ and ‘patterns of relationship’. This is largely because of the limitation of our faculties to discriminate highly complex patterns. Bateson (in Keeney, 1979), reinforces that if you want to understand a phenomenon in greater complexity or integrity, you must consider the phenomenon within its larger context, taking into account all the things that are relevant to it. This would imply taking the whole context and system around the phenomena into account.

Ecosystemic epistemology consequently defines ‘system’ as a cybernetic network that processes information, or as Bateson puts it, “any unit containing feedback structures and therefore competent to process information” (in Keeney, 1979, p.119). The concept of cybernetic networks is fundamental to ecosystemic thinking. Looking more closely at the world of cybernetics and systems we find the following:

Cybernetic Epistemology

The primordial idea that gave birth to cybernetics stated that pattern organizes all physical and mental processes. Keeney (1983) expands on this stating, “Cybernetics is

best ascribed to the science of pattern and organization, which is in turn clearly distinct from any search for material things, force, and energy. In cybernetics, anything or rather any idea, is 'real'" (p.61). Following this pattern that any idea is real implies that all thoughts give rise to some form of reality and the implication of multiple realities therefor becomes more evident. Within ecosystemic thinking then, all versions and experiences of a person's world are respected and upheld as equally valid.

It is furthermore important to realize that cybernetic processes never elect a static, steady state (Keeney, 1983). As Bateson (1972, p.381) notes, "corrective action is brought about by difference". Cybernetics therefore suggests that "all change can be understood as the effort to maintain some constancy and all constancy as maintained through change. One cannot, in cybernetics separate stability from change – both are complementary sides of a systemic coin. Cybernetics proposes that change cannot be found without a roof of stability over its head. Similarly, stability will always be rooted to underlying processes of change" (Keeney, 1983, p.69). Once again the pattern of movement and ever evolving connection within cybernetic thinking becomes evident. Embracing the flow and contrast of language that respects cybernetic thinking consequently becomes relevant in dealing with this epistemology.

Considering language, we can say that it is a very powerful tool, as it is one of the primary ways of revealing what a person's epistemology is. The language we use to describe our world has been spoken of as an epistemological knife, with the potential power to slice our world into bits and pieces. Language thus in turn profoundly affects epistemology, if seen in the light that one's epistemology and premises for action are constrained by the deep structure or underlying forms of language. The structure of occidental language seems to imply that there is no way of avoiding slicing the world into nameable pieces. This naming of 'parts' leads to some form of dualism even when one is trying to avoid this. What can be termed the 'cybernetic use of language' involves 'preserving' and 'challenging' an awareness of the whole interactive system (Keeney, 1983; Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982). Both ecosystemic epistemology and cybernetic language attempt a non-dualistic conceptualization of life that recognizes complete ecosystems rather than isolated parts that act, react or interact with each other. This

perspective makes an attempt to avoid any over-emphasis upon dualisms that may overshadow the connectivity of whole systems, and a holistic preservation is thus sought after. An example of this would be where a researcher is always viewed as an integrated unit of the research system and not as an objective observer looking in on the system. All participants are connected as parts of a complete cybernetic circuit (Keeney, 1983; Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982). So too in the human-animal relationship, all parts of the system will be seen to act upon each other recursively as a cybernetic circuit.

As noted, cyberneticians have argued that the dualistic use of language leads to the dismemberment of whole systems. This is often illustrated when researchers break up the natural history of the process of a relationship into different discrete functions, resulting in too often losing sight of the completeness or connectedness of the interactive-relational process. Dualism's such as observer and observed and man and nature are consequently the result. This is also seen in the institutions where animals are introduced as interventions to act independently on, and to 'relieve' the patients of the difficult context. Each of these distinctions presupposes that a delimited 'self' is separate from the environment. The idea that a human being is separate from his/her environment is an epistemological distinction that nowadays underlies most of our thinking about human interaction. Ecosystemic epistemology does not embrace this view and in turn attempts to mend these static, rigid dualities by embodying non-dualistic, cybernetic language. Cybernetic epistemology begins this by drawing a pattern of recursion through both sides of these distinctions. Considering the interactions between humans and animals will for example, emphasize this. Tracking these repeated interactions highlights the underlying patterns. Cybernetics looks for these patterns that connect both components through a reciprocal, feedback structure (Keeney, 1983; Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982).

In a reciprocally causal cycle, each person's behaviour both influences, and is influenced by the behaviour of others in the system. Within this cycle, a person's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, behaviour and communication patterns are reflexive and organized by the system, often without the participant's awareness (Stachiwak & Briggs, 1984). In general, to keep sight of the recursive process we must carefully

construct our observations and descriptions, avoiding rigid demarcations of parts of the system as mechanisms.

As mentioned, a fundamental premise of cybernetic epistemology holds that we embrace both sides of any distinction that an observer draws. This is known as the study of complementary relationships. A cybernetic complementarity provides an alternative framework for examining distinctions or descriptions. For the most part, people take distinctions to be representations of an either/or duality, or polarity. It is important to note that a cybernetic complementarity involves different orders of recursion, which demonstrate how pairs can be related and yet remain distinct, illustrating the recursive nature of a natural epistemology. These complementarities can be seen as 'reframings' in terms of the recursive processes of the distinctions that people draw. "The perspective of cybernetic complementarities transforms our ways of knowing toward the aesthetic vision poets have always known. Such a vision views all mental and living process as recursive and complementary. The alternative is to chop the world into innumerable dualisms that separate us from the various parts of our experience" (Keeney, 1983, p.92), in doing this we see only one side of life, never truly acknowledging the whole. Gregory Bateson (in Keeney, 1983) said of such dualisms, "Rigor alone is paralytic death, but imagination alone is insanity" (p.94). "We are therefore responsible for contextualizing our perceptions, whether they belong to medicine, education, engineering or psychotherapy" (Keeney, 1983, p.189). The cybernetic view therefore requires responsibility from a person without laying blame at any one person's door.

Part of this responsibility relates to our position within the system. The assumption that an observer stands outside of a particular phenomenon often leads to the idea that the outsider is in a position to unilaterally manipulate or control that which is being observed. However, at a higher order of recursion, the investigator is part of the whole system and therefore subject to all its constraints and other actions or interactions. At this level, the observer/investigator is incapable of unilateral control. Any sense of control is merely an illusion, as control ultimately lies within the larger ecology, and even the concept of control can be argued to be false. This represents an evolution from simple cybernetics to

what has been called 'cybernetics of cybernetics' or 'second-order cybernetics' (Keeney, 1983).

Second-Order Cybernetics

Contemporary or second-order cybernetics, often called cybernetics of cybernetics, emphasizes that the observer is always part of the system observed. This is due to the belief that it is simply not possible to achieve an 'objective' view of the world, because observations will always be influenced by the perspective of the observer. Second-order cybernetics places the observer firmly within that which is observed. The implication of which is that all observation involves self-reference, and all description is self-referential, therefore saying as much or more about the observer as it says about the subject of description (Atkinson & Heath, 1987; Keeney, 1983). In order to 'know', one must first make a distinction, and the act of making a distinction in itself suggests a choice or preference. A researcher's view of a particular situation will therefore presuppose certain preferences which the researcher has. Second order cybernetics increasingly points to the position that 'objectivity' is erroneous since it assumes a separation of the observer and the observed. This perspective suggests that descriptions reveal the observer in as much or more light, as the subjects of description (Keeney, 1983).

Recent work in second-order cybernetics has demonstrated how the distinctions and descriptions made by the observer can bring forth cognitive domains in language. As we observe the behaviour of ourselves and others, we constantly use language to distinguish mental and physiological domains, we then employ theories, usually implicitly, about how the mental and physiological domains may be interacting to produce the behaviour. As discussed, a distinction splits the world into two parts, 'that and this', or 'us and them'. "We need to cease trying to deal with behaviour in bits and pieces as though it is somehow separate from the larger contextual interdependencies in which it occurs. The view of cybernetics of cybernetics is one that recognizes the wholeness of a given realm of phenomena" (Keeney, 1983, p.100).

In addressing this, Rollo May states that as natural epistemologists, “we don’t study nature, we investigate the investigator’s relationship to nature” (in Keeney, 1984, p.30). To recognize that these apparent dualities are not two, requires first drawing a distinction. We could not realize the whole gestalt without having first noted that it subsumes different parts. On the other hand, parts cannot be distinguished without having assumed a whole from which they are abstracted. In essence, we are left with the realization that the differences we draw are neither one, nor two. The world we know is neither real, nor illusion” (Keeney, 1983, p.63). As natural epistemologists, our dilemma has to do with drawing distinctions in order to know a world, while knowing that these constructions are illusory. Although counterintuitive for the observer, cybernetics points to the fact that there can be as many ‘realities’ as the observer chooses to create through distinctions. Because ideas shape perceptions, and our ideas are continuously influx with other ideas in different systems, these ‘realities’ are always co-created. A premise of ‘co-construction’ requires that for the investigation of any given situation a description of each person’s story is necessary, i.e. an understanding of how each person involved [in the system] views its origin, maintenance, and possible solution (Griffith, Griffith & Slovik, 1990). Cybernetic epistemology therefore insists that we respect all parts of our experience, whether we punctuate them as inside or outside the boundaries of our skin (Keeney, 1983, p.141).

Respecting all parts of our experience leads to the exploration of the concept of ‘double description’.

Double Description

Fundamentally, double description is an epistemological tool that enables one to generate and discern different orders of pattern. “ [Just] as two eyes can derive depth, two descriptions can derive pattern and relationship” (Keeney, 1983, p.38, Penn, 1982). “When two people interact, each one punctuates the flow of interaction, for the observer, this means that the simultaneous combination of their distinctions yields a glimpse of the whole relationship” (Keeney, 1983, p. 37). Bateson (1979) calls this view ‘double

description' and compares it to binocular vision: "It is correct (and a great improvement) to begin to think of the two parties to the interaction as two eyes, each giving a monocular view of what goes on and, together, giving a view in depth. This double view is the relationship" (p.133).

A double description should exist to give an event context and meaning. "Double description requires that a relationship be viewed from every side and juxtapositioned to generate a sense of the relationship as a whole. Binocular vision, double description, and the creation of moiré patterns provide evidence that we perceive is 'difference'" (Keeney, 1983, p.153). In this dialectical process, seeing a world partially follows from how we draw distinctions upon it. It is as if one's hand draws outlines on one's own retina. This process is recursive – what one sees, one draws and vice versa. Since form and process can swallow each other in a recursive fashion, it is always possible to generate different orders of view. In this regard, double description is not a static principle, it is a description of relationship. "The process view of double description suggests that we may use language in a coevolutionary manner in which new orders of difference, relationship, and context may spring forth" (Penn, 1982, p.268). Through double description we ultimately aim to generate descriptions which are as representative of the whole as possible.

Co-evolutionary Change

Since the early seventies, the idea that living ecologies progress toward higher orders of complexity in a coevolutionary fashion has been dramatically emphasized by researchers in the biological sciences. This idea eventually flowed over into the social science through pivotal thinkers such as Gregory Bateson. Bateson (in Penn, 1982) claimed "[that] if interaction between persons could undergo progressive qualitative change as intensity increased, then surely this could be the stuff of cultural evolution. It followed that all directional change even in biological evolution...might or must be due to progressive interaction between organisms" (p.268). Bateson's observations led him to identify 'interaction' as the unit of evolution, rather than any one side of a relationship.

“As biologists began to see this larger pattern of evolution, made possible through a process of double description, the term ‘coevolution’ evolved in their vocabulary” (in Penn, 1982, p.268).

Cybernetics further evolved to include the concepts ‘ecology of ideas’ and ‘meaning-systems’ which furthered the understanding of co-evolutionary change. These concepts were highlighted by Bateson (in Bogdan, 1984) who repeatedly emphasized that the world of communication or context is a mental construct in which determinism in the usual sense has no place. The sole point being that the world of communication is made up entirely of ideas and their meanings, and that there are in the mind no actual objects or events, only representations and images and rules for making these. Behaviour is then dependent upon the meaning of events rather than upon the events themselves. Understanding how a system is organized is essentially how the ideas and behaviour of each member in the system support and sustain the ideas and behaviour of every other member so that the system displays order, pattern, or redundancy. The acquisition or modification of an idea, in one or more individuals leads to change in other individuals so that new ideas and new interactional patterns are evolved. This change is then reliant upon the ever intensifying interactions between the individuals (Bogdan, 1984). The core assumption is that people behave according to how they frame, define, or punctuate the situations in which they are actors. Our ideas are always in some sense adaptations to an environment consisting largely of the ongoing behaviours of others (Bogdan, 1984).

“Through the exchange of ideas then, new ideas evolve until some form of consensus is reached. This evolution of new ideas from original ideas is a cooperative, reciprocal venture involving everybody who partakes in the dialogue. Thus, the dialogue can be viewed as a coevolutionary process through which a new ‘reality’ is cooperatively constructed in and for that system” (Fourie, 1993, p.230).

Cybernetic epistemology expanded its repertoire to form interplay with worldviews such as constructivism and social constructionism. While the writer has found it more useful to apply social constructionism to this exploratory study, constructivism will be

considered briefly as it has some valuable constructs which run parallel to constructionism.

Constructivism versus Constructionism

Social constructionism is often confused with radical constructivism, however the two positions are quite different (Hoffman, 1992). There is a common ground in that both take issue with the modernist idea that a real world exists that can be known with objective certainty. However the beliefs represented by constructivism tend to promote an image of the nervous system as a closed machine. According to this view, precepts and constructs take shape as the organisms 'bump' against the environment. "Any so-called reality is in the most immediate and concrete sense, the construction of those who believe they have discovered and investigated it" (Golan, 1987, p.332). All that can be exchanged between entities are ideas, even though concrete objects might symbolize these. In this view, nothing of the world out there can ever be known, but is filtered through the organism's nervous system. This system then determines the reality which is perceived, and can never directly be influenced by another. Constructivism is often criticized as being a solipsistic view of life. By contrast, the social constructionist theorists see ideas, concepts and memories arising from social interchange and mediated through language, where all knowledge evolves in the space between people in a realm of the 'common world'. Only through the continuous conversation with others does an individual develop a sense and knowing of self and inner voice (Hoffman, 1992). "Social constructionists hold firmly to the idea that there is no incontrovertible social truth, only stories about the world we tell others and ourselves" (Hoffman, 1992, p.19). A greater, in-depth exploration of this will now follow.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with examining the processes which people engage in to describe, explain and understand the world in which they live. What we experience of our world does not necessarily account for the terms by which the world is understood. From this perspective then, the possibility of an observer-independent world, where observation that yields objective, generalizable 'truth' is possible, becomes obsolete. This is replaced by the notion that we construct our ideas and experiences of our world through continual interaction with others. In this interaction we can be none other than active participant observers, and each construction we make, each account of our lives or experience is open to constant revision (Anderson & Swim, 1993; Fruggeri, 1992; Gergen, 1985).

In this way of thinking, knowledge and the knower are interactionally dependent, the forces of nature do not automatically drive understanding. Everything in our lives is co-authored, and is an active, co-operative enterprise and product of a community of persons in relationships. Knowledge then emerges as an on-going self-referential construction, a recursion of descriptions that generate other descriptions. The definition of knowledge as a self-referential process is the starting point for the elaboration of a scientific paradigm that cannot rely on objectivity, on an accurate and descriptive language, or on a universal conceptual framework. It is a paradigm that acknowledges the impossibility of separating the study of an object from the study of the knowing subject (Anderson 1993; Fruggeri, 1992; Gergen, 1985).

Kelly (in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) himself claimed that it was presumption to assume that a person's constructions of reality were convergent with reality itself, and suggested that, "the open question for man is not whether reality exists or not but what he can make of it" (p.77). It would then follow, that events or situations are theoretically open to as many constructions as what there are persons participating in the particular situation, or to as many reconstructions as a single individual's imagination allows. Schutz (in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) likewise found reality a concept difficult to explain unless rooted

in the meanings that are constructed and attached to everyday life by individuals. This view reminds us that the perception of 'individuals' and 'families' is also constructed, and in part an arbitrary punctuation. "One could alternatively choose to focus on more holistic metaphors and patterns, which dissolve any particular person, place, or nodal point" (Keeney, 1984, p.36). The rules for 'what counts as what' are inherently ambiguous, continuously evolving, and free to vary with the preferences of those who use them. "On these grounds, one is even led to query the concept of truth" (Gergen, 1985, p.268).

Through these constructions and many truths, our social world can be seen as constituted in and through a network of multiple stories or narratives. To begin with, stories or narratives are self-regulated, semantic systems, but stories are also located in the shared realm of consensus. Each story is therefore in turn embedded in a complex network of reciprocally influencing narratives. This ecology of stories, with different degrees of importance at different moments and in different contexts, establishes the frames within which we become aware of ourselves and of others. From this perspective, language is not representational, what we call 'reality' resides in and is expressed in an individual's descriptions of events, ideas, feelings, and experiences. These descriptions, in turn, evolve through social interactions that are themselves shaped by those descriptions (Sluzki, 1992).

Social constructionism further views these narratives and knowledge as events constructed within relationships and mediated through language, not as single truths existing in someone's head (Anderson, 1993). Given this view our thoughts are formed at the boundary between a word's use and the reply it elicits, or a non-verbal response and the reply it elicits. Ideas then come to life only through dialogue, either internal dialogue or through conversation with others. Hoffman (1992) speaks of the word reflexivity with high regard and states that to her reflexivity represents the figure eight of infinity within communication. Within this, there is place for the inner dialogue of the person as well as for the intersection representing the forum where the inner and outer dialogue meet and speak (Weingarten, 1991). It is this internal dialogue that changes the

dialogue with others. Social constructionism helps us to understand this back-and-forth experience of talking to ourselves, as well as the inevitable momentum it generates toward our conversations with others, it is through this that meaning ultimately emerges (Penn & Frankfurt, 1994).

Anderson and Swim (1993) propose that dialogue or language does not refer to a specific focus on signs, structure, or style. Neither does it refer to the sounds we make with our mouths nor the marks we make with our pens. Rather, it refers to the means we use to communicate with one another, and the negotiated contextually relevant meaning that is interactively generated through the medium of words as well as 'other communicative action'. This 'other communicative action' includes the spoken and unspoken language of words, sounds, gestures and symbols. Goolishian and Anderson (1987) also state that language can only take on meaning in human interaction and therefore, 'meaning' is interactional, local in nature, and always changing. In essence the writer agrees with this, but believes that by virtue of the fact that language can take place through 'other communicative action', *any* living system 'in language' can evolve meaning with *any* other living system. The essence of language is then derived from this added dimension of meaningfulness springing forth from the domain including that 'other than words' (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). The potential meaning within the human-animal relationship would be an example of this. Consequently there is only language when there is that identity that we call meaning, and meaning, and understanding are socially and intersubjectively constructed. Intersubjective refers to an evolving state of affairs in which two or more living entities agree that they are experiencing the same event in the same way, however, it is still understood that agreement is fragile and continually open to renegotiations and dispute (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). In monologue, no new meaning arises, a single perspective reigns and the reality becomes closed (Goolishian & Anderson, 1987). This would render the following premise applicable too, "that there is no universal validity to meaning and that meaning, like thinking, is intersubjective" (Goolishian & Anderson, 1987, p.532).

We live, think, work and feel with each other, and all this takes place through language. We speak, hear, write and use all of the many expressions and forms of language as part of the process of creating and dealing with the realities in which we exist. It is in language that meaningful human contact can be maintained and through which reality is shared. To be 'in-language', refers to the process of sharing temporary realities with each other, which has been created amongst each other. The construction of meaning and understanding, is a constantly changing, creative, dynamic and recursive process. This view of interconnectedness does not rely on a definition of perception and cognition that requires a representational or objective view of reality (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). Change, whether in the cognitive or behavioural domain, is a natural consequence of dialogue (Anderson & Swim, 1993). In this view, the concept of permanence or stagnation is a creation existing in language resulting in independent and enduring entities in an experiential world always in flux and change. As systems are fluid, changing, never stable, and never finite, change then too, is evolution of new meaning through dialogue. Our theories, as well as our practices of therapy/research are meant as temporary lenses rather than as representations that conform to a social reality (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). Within this framework, there are no 'real' external entities, only communicating individuals.

Language or perhaps more appropriately communication, is the transformation of experience, and at the same time it transforms what is experienced. There are therefore a multiplicity of languages and histories, which can be lived, and these are lived in terms of our interpretations and attributions of meaning. Through dialogue, systems mutually evolve their own language and confirm its meaning. It is this evolutionary, linguistic process that produces the regularities and patterns that become models for understanding the phenomena within systems. Systems can be described as existing only in communicative action, and not existing outside of this as reified entities. In the domain of meaning, social systems are communication networks that are distinguished in and by language (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). Braten (in Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, p.378), defines a sociocultural system as a "meaning-processing system of interacting participants who maintain and transform the identity of themselves and of their network

through a more or less shared understanding of both themselves and the world.” He further suggests that this shared understanding is neither subjective nor objective, but intersubjective, generating the subject-object complementarity. Thus, social systems are a constantly changing product of socially communicated realities, and are based in the uncertainties of dialogue in our continuing struggles to reach agreement. Communication defines social organization, that is, a sociocultural system is the product of social communication rather than communication being a product of organization.

Social constructionism has been presented as emphasizing meaning as an intersubjective phenomenon, created and experienced by individuals in conversation and action with others and themselves. It has also been said that conversation provides the frames within which social action takes place, a statement which echoes Bateson’s notion that the mind is social (in Sluzki, 1992). This assumes that human action takes place in a reality of understanding that is created through social construction and dialogue and furthermore that we live and understand our lives through socially constructed narrative realities. That implies that we give meaning and organization to our experiences and to our self-identity in the course of these transactions. “In this sense, words gain their meaning not through their capacity to picture reality, but through their use in social interchange. We are engaged then, in games of language, and it is by virtue of their use within these games that words acquire meaning” (Gergen & Kaye, 1992, p.177). Knowing is therefore always communicated through language in whatever form this may be, and accordingly is linguistically and socially constructed (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Anderson & Swim, 1993; Goolishian & Anderson, 1987).

Conclusion

In this chapter, the perspective that direct and objective knowledge of the world around us is not available has been put forward. It has also been argued that what we know of the world is through our own experience of it, that we cannot truly know another person's experience of the world, and that the best we can do is to interpret the experience of others as they express it. To interpret other's expressions, we have to rely on our own experience and imagination (Epston, White & Murray, 1992). Language creates the world and nature that we know. In this context, understanding does not mean that we ever manage to understand another person. On the contrary, we are able to understand through dialogue only what it is that the other person is trying to express. Through this we can then appreciate the larger patterns, cycles and contextual harmonies woven within people's stories.

In order to give meaning to our experiences we must organize, frame and give pattern to these experiences. These frames and patterns can be termed as the stories of our lives. It is through these stories that our lived experience is interpreted and understood. Epston, White and Murray (1992) believe that it is through stories that we obtain a sense of our how our lives change, and that it is through stories that we are able to weave a thread of meaning through the unfolding events of our lives. It is also from here onward then that the unfoldment of the story of the exploration into the 'meaning' and 'essence' of the human-animal bond begins. The research methods and rationale that were applied in this exploratory study will first be presented followed by the research findings.

CHAPTER 4

A MAP FOR EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

"In our attempt to be scientific, we have suppressed our fantasies and our dreams. We are not free to feel but instead must think and evaluate. We are no longer entitled to learn by sensing and feeling intuitively; we must 'know' and 'prove'. We must close our minds and senses to many events, convince ourselves that they don't even exist" (Levinson, 1984, p.85).

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the proposed research design for this study, and includes a discussion of the requirements for qualitative or naturalistic research. Included in this chapter will be the proposed research procedures to be used within the case study. The aim is to provide a thorough and systematic foundation for the case study that follows in Chapter 5.

The Fundamentals of Research Principles

Positivistic versus Ecosystemic Research

Over the years there have been many heated debates within the scientific research arena as to which approach within research is more appropriate and 'scientific', that is the traditional positivistic approach versus an alternative, more naturalistic and qualitative approach. Echoing this, Wassenaar (1987) states that within the family therapy field, an epistemological and methodological impasse exists between linear, positivistic science and ecosystemic principles. Newtonian, positivistic science requires research of a 'scientific' nature, that is a concern with objectivity, quantifiable measurement and outcome. Positivism is additionally based on the premise that knowledge must be

constituted by sense experience, thereby eliminating metaphysics. According to the ecosystemic paradigm however, emphasis is placed on the ecology, relationships and whole systems. Within this frame of reference space may be found for a research participant's personal experiences and beliefs. In contrast to a positivistic epistemology, this approach focuses on interrelations between entities, context as well as complexity (Keeney, 1979).

Schwartz (1982) comments that a paradigmatic shift has taken place within psychology from a linear, positivistic model to a circular, ecosystemic model, however, he contends that a subsequent shift in methods for assessing these processes has not occurred. In addition to this, Schwartzman (1984) advances the argument that an adherence to the linear research model may be compared to a social ritual, which like all rituals, ultimately prescribes the limit of what is regarded as research and therefore prevents change from occurring within the field of psychology. This atomistic approach relates directly from the philosophical tradition of 'positivism'. "Since an atomistic science can only produce atomistic 'facts', it is constantly validated by experiments that assume atomistic data and concurrently eliminates process and context as basic aspects of the psychosocial world" (Schwartzman, 1984, p.226). This view continues to confirm the already accepted reality of what is 'right' or 'wrong' in our world.

When looking more closely at qualitative research though, it can be said that all qualitative researchers in some way reflect a phenomenological perspective. Working in this mode an attempt is made to understand the meaning of naturally occurring, complex events and interactions from the point of view of the research participants involved. The researcher looks for universal principles by examining a case study intensively. The exploration of the case study is conducted within the natural context in which the behaviour occurs, and the focus is on looking at events and actions in a holistic, rather than a reductionistic manner. The generic question qualitative researchers tend to ask, is 'what's going on here and why?', they attempt to approach their data without a priori assumptions, to see events in a new way before interpreting what they see (Moon, Dillon

& Sprenkle, 1990). When working qualitatively the case study is interpreted according to the particulars of the case instead of in terms of generalizations.

Traditionally, quantitative and qualitative methods have been presented as diametrically opposed to one another, with a forced choice between one method and the other (Sells, Smith & Sprenkle, 1995). Wassenaar (1987) however proposes that neither an exclusively positivistic nor an exclusively qualitative methodology may be considered to be more effective in determining the nature of 'truth' or 'reality'. As Keeney (1983, p.92) suggests, "perhaps researchers in both schools have lost sight of the fact that form and process...part and pattern, observer and observation, reductionism and holism, are 'cybernetic complementarities'." Although founded on fundamentally different principles, both positivistic and ecosystemic research approaches should be conceptualized as having equivalent validity in their explanations of the nature of truth. The usefulness of these two approaches should not be discounted. On the one hand, positivistic research has value in describing phenomena at an atomistic level and on the other, ecosystemic research has value in facilitating the identification and understanding of patterns which comprise and are comprised by these 'atoms' (Wassenaar, 1987).

The following quote by Higgins (1993, p.85), perhaps best illustrates the relativity of the different approaches, and the multitude of interpretations residing in research:

"Our search for meaning can take us in a number of directions...We can find ourselves unravelling a sequence of behaviour as though we were translating a foreign tongue. Or we can find ourselves creating new meanings by combining old ones in an imaginative medium. Or we can find ourselves sifting associations seeing what goes with what, or what causes what effect."

Keeney (1983) suggests that all approaches should be considered in the search for a greater understanding of the processes involved in change, and that all approaches may be equally valid given the context. It is the writer's belief however, that quantitative research alone presents only one side of the truth in conceptualising human behaviour. It

is suggested here that the use of qualitative methods or what is termed as naturalistic research is more suitable in the current study to the investigation of the process, pattern and context which exists within the wider system. This approach will also yield a more comprehensive account of human behaviour and in this case, the embedded meaning within the human-animal bond. As Higgins (1993, p.850) says,

“It should always be remembered that there are times when enquiry into meaning cannot usefully be reduced to the research mould of logical argument and testing of probability statements. With this proviso, case study and research should, on many occasions, go together as complementary moves.”

Naturalistic Research

Bateson (1972) suggests that ecosystemic epistemology defines the term ‘system’ as “any unit containing feedback structure and therefore competent to process information” (p.243). Research situations may then be seen as systems, wherein the researcher joins a cybernetic network which consists of a complex, intertwined process of human interaction in which relevant information processes take place (Keeney, 1979). In this instance, the researcher joined a cybernetic network consisting of human-animal interactions, in this manner becoming an extension of this system.

A central individual in a system (such as the researcher), is always a part of the system and is consequently subject to all the constraints and necessities of the particular relationships within which she/he exists within the system. This describes the researcher’s obtrusive presence in the ecosystem he/she partakes in as ‘part in’ or ‘part of’ the ecosystem, rather than as an outside spectator or manipulator. This brings to light a most important idea in cybernetics and systems theory today, which is that mutual, reciprocal, simultaneous interactions define, identify, and constitute whole systems. It is therefore the simultaneous interactions between investigator and participant that characterize a whole system. In this interactional sense, the researcher is always a part of the system she/he attempts to make sense of. These simultaneous interactions self-

referentially identify and define the whole system (Keeney, 1979). This emphasis on 'self-referential systems' has shifted the focus from 'the cybernetics of observed systems', to that of 'the cybernetics of observing systems'. Within this the researcher uses herself as a nodal point of reference.

This way of 'looking' is a taoistic one and does not purposively seek information in any strict programmed format, but one becomes receptive to the experience within the context. In other words, the experience happens instead of being made to happen. Maslow describes 'taoistic knowing' as a "receptive openness...finding of order rather than an ordering" (in Keeney, 1979, p.126).

Naturalistic research further elects qualitative over quantitative methods because they are more adaptable to dealing with the multiple realities found in relationships. These methods are also more sensitive and adaptable to the many mutual shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered in relationships. Furthermore, these methods illustrate the extent to which the investigator's own posture influences the results of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The writing of a qualitative research report demands the creation of a narrative or story. This narrative will for a specific purpose be used to tell the tale of a particular situation or circumstance in which an observer has been present (Ely, 1991). Knowledge, being socially arrived at, will change and renew this narrative in each moment of interaction. With this view one will hopefully expect new and more useful narratives to emerge during conversation, but this should be seen as spontaneous rather than planned. The conversation, (and not the researcher, or participants) is the author of the narrative (Hoffman, 1992). With the telling of such a narrative it is perhaps wise to remember the influence of the differing worldviews that people may have. This is best espoused by Bateson (in Colapinto, 1979), he noted: "That there is no such thing as a 'neutral' or 'uncontaminated' grasping of 'reality', but rather a patterned approach to it after a set of categories that regulate both our perception of and our action on reality" (p.428). Watzlawick (in Atkinson & Heath, 1987) echoes similar sentiments with the following

quote, “relationships are not aspects of first-order reality, whose true nature can be determined scientifically; instead, they are pure constructs of the partners in the relationship, and as such they resist all objective verification” (p.9).

Due to the aforementioned belief, the investigator prefers to negotiate meanings and interpretations with the participants in the study. This is because participants are in a better position to interpret the complex mutual interactions and shaping forces that enter into what is observed. They would know best how to interpret the influence of local value patterns in their context. Working hypotheses are probably best verified by the people who inhabit the context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In addition to this it is of value to emphasize that in the naturalistic paradigm, meaningful human research is impossible without the full understanding and co-operation of the respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As Gergen (1985) puts this, the constructivist position is one where “the process of understanding is not automatically driven by the forces of nature, but is the result of an active, co-operative enterprise of persons in relationships” (p.267). Researchers, like therapists, affect the systems they are researching whether they intend to or not, and similarly, the system and participants always affect the researcher (Keeney, 1982).

Aim of the Study

For the purpose of this study, the writer will attempt to describe the unique experiential world of the human-animal bond. Within this experiential world, the role of the animal member within the family system, and the different meanings around this relationship as understood through the co-constructions explored within the research system will be considered. This will be done by relying on mutual interdependence between the participants and investigator within the system under investigation. In so doing, an investigation and examination of belief systems regarding the perceptions of the ‘human-animal bond’ is facilitated. Furthermore, a construction of the phenomenon of ‘human-

animal bond' as a holistic entity is subsequently possible within the framework of an ecosystemic paradigm as opposed to the dualistic nature of the Newtonian approach.

Research Design

A qualitative method will be used to generate theoretical concepts inductively from the participant's detailed descriptions (Sells, et al., 1995). This is based on the fact that a single case will be investigated thoroughly.

When looking at definitions of the case study, they seem vary widely. Different writers agree that a case study is an intensive investigation, a complete examination or a detailed account of a facet, an issue, or perhaps the events at a geographic setting over time. It has also been defined as the detailed account of an individual person (Kazdin, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It can be said then, that the case study is an idiographic approach, in that each individual case is unique and examined in depth. The idiographic approach aims at understanding the pattern of relationships between the components that are being studied. Idiographic interpretation becomes important when the researcher wants to experience the meaning in any relevant situation. Idiographic interpretation implies understanding in a truly holistic manner.

The case report is consequently the ideal for providing the 'thick description' thought to be essential for a shared understanding to unfold of the phenomena. It attempts to make clear the complexities of the context and the ways these interact to form whatever it is that the case report portrays. The case report lends itself most to the notions of multiple realities, which are difficult to communicate in scientific form. The interactions of investigator and participants (which must be denied in the conventional forms as contamination of the research) are also difficult to express in this form. The values of the investigator, of the context, and the mutual shaping that is seen to occur is not done justice by the conventional forms of research. A function of the case study is that it provides audiences with a 'revelation' of a specific situation, context, person, community

or system. Platt (1988) refers to this as a means of making visible certain phenomena, which would otherwise be cut off from certain audiences. According to Platt, the case study provides the reader with 'human interest', and provides a more humanistic mode of presentation than that of the traditional 'scientific' or quantitative style. This presentation provides an aesthetic appeal to case study material rendering it more 'real' and understandable. It thus becomes a construction by the participants and investigator, describing to the reader the scene and the pervasive qualities and characteristics of the phenomena at hand. The use of such linguistic devices should create descriptions so vivid that the reader can almost see, hear and feel them (Ely, 1991).

Within the case study an emergent design will be used. This is where the investigator elects to allow the research design to emerge (flow and unfold), rather than to construct it pre-ordinately. This is because it is inconceivable that enough could be known ahead of time about the multitude of realities within the context to devise a design adequately. What emerges as a function of the interaction between inquirer and participants is largely unpredictable in advance, and the inquirer cannot know sufficiently well the patterns of connection that are likely to exist. The various value systems within the research context interact in unpredictable ways to influence the outcome of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Briefly defined the researcher begins with a discovery-orientated research design. This is done to generate descriptive categories and theoretical concepts, which come directly from the detailed descriptions the participants provide the investigator with. These detailed descriptions are obtained through open-ended, exploratory interviews and observations that generate core categories or emergent themes across all the interviews and observations collected in the study (Sells, et al., 1995). The data collection and analysis are intimately linked because the researcher may not know what questions to ask until initial interviews and field notes have been analyzed and tentative conclusions formulated (Sells, et al., 1995). Therefore a set format and rigid demarcations cannot be indicated at the outset.

It follows that research is a creative activity that cannot be cast into the model of absolute determinism because it is not an event that one can predict as the result of antecedent conditions. New ideas, insights and hypotheses evolve as the inquirer seeks to reconstruct the constructions of reality provided by the human sources under investigation (Reason & Rowan, 1985). In the naturalistic paradigm the investigator and participant/s together create the data of the research. They mutually influence each other so that the direction that the data gathering takes at a particular moment is dependent on what data have already been collected and how they have been collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Keeney (1982) says that the method by which data are gathered – in other words the methods help to create the ‘reality’ of the problem/question being researched, it is therefore vital that the methods be ‘context-congruent’. The nature of this design in this particular study will be considered next.

The Nature of the Case Study

This case study is primarily exploratory in nature, and can be described as an exploratory-descriptive case study. It attempts to uncover new information involving the embedded meanings within the human-animal bond and the mutual influence of these on the larger systems. Within this exploratory-descriptive case study the researcher aims to arrive at an in-depth understanding that provides a rich and accurate description of the case. This type of case study has been referred to as the ‘configurative-idiographic’ type because the purpose is to show the details of one particular case without the need to generalise the data to other cases. Due to the exploratory nature of this case study it may have limited influence on developing theory, however, it cannot be devoid of a theoretical perspective since the language and concepts used in the description imply certain theoretical assumptions (Kazdin, 1981).

Method

The Context

The research will be carried out in the natural setting or context in which the participants find themselves when interacting with one another. This is because naturalistic ontology suggests that realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts. They can also not be fragmented for the separate study of any of their parts, due to the belief that the whole is more than the sum of the parts, and because of the belief that the very act of observation influences what is seen. For greatest understanding the research interaction should take place with the participants-in-context. The natural context is further important because contextual value structures determine to a degree what will be found in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

According to Reason & Rowan (1981), the researcher seeks to encourage a culture in which the participants can study themselves in action, recognising their own behaviour, thoughts and attentional dynamics as they occur, and correcting incongruities as they occur. Studying oneself in action requires the kinds of behaviour and thinking that are conducive to discovering what is going on in social situations rather than assuming one knows at the outset. A naturalistic context is greatly conducive to this kind of discovery.

Participants

Initially the research procedure involved eliciting participation of a person in a significant relationship with one or more animal/s. This participant would also represent her/his family and other significant systems. The main criterion of the selection was that the human-animal relationship had to be one that was experienced on a daily basis. The participants also had to be 'dedicated' to each other, this had to have evolved naturally into an owner-companion animal bond without interventions from outside institutions or programmes introducing the animal as a 'therapeutic agent'. A further prerequisite was that the human participant was not to be in therapy, or undergoing any other sort of

intensive medical or psychological treatment. The person would have to be from an average population group in the sense that no specific disabilities or other physical problems were present.

Procedure

The request was formulated as follows: Whether the respondent/s would be prepared to participate in an assignment which would explore the relationship between human and animal. The meanings co-created within the relationship and the wider system (particularly family system) which formed a fit with this relationship would be considered. The interaction between participant and investigator would also bear relevance. The participant was also informed that the information would greatly contribute to the present knowledge of how and why these relationships are and could be more meaningful in every day life, as well as the possible therapeutic implications of this. The 'exploratory conversations' took place over a period of six months during which time approximately two interviews per month took place, spaced approximately two weeks apart. At times this varied depending on the convenience to all concerned.

Instrument

As the primary data-gathering tool, the researcher elects to use herself as 'human instrument' along with the other participants. This is in preference to questionnaires or other 'artificial instruments. It would virtually be impossible to devise a priori a non-human instrument with sufficient adaptability to encompass and adjust to the variety of realities that will be encountered. Although all instruments interact inherently with participants, it is only the human instrument that is capable of grasping and evaluating the finer meaning of interaction. The intrusion of instruments intervenes in the mutual shaping of other elements, and that shaping can be appreciated and evaluated only by a human being that is flexible. All instruments are value-based and interact with local values but only the human instrument is in a position to identify and take into account (to some extent) those resulting biases. Naturalistic research is carried out in a naturalistic

setting, which makes the human instrument the only choice of instrumentation because only the human instrument has the adaptive characteristics necessary to cope with the indeterminate situation encountered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Reason & Rowan, 1981).

The human participant in the study will also provide revision of the case study by reading the final draught and being in a position to make comments and recommendations. This is advised by Yin (1989), the primary reason being that the participants, inherently understanding their context can provide helpful comments about the study, and provide some form of validation for the constructs drawn.

Data collection and recording

The use of field notes as being a preferable mode of research over that of audio or video recordings has been argued by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Although greater fidelity may be obtained with recordings, Lincoln and Guba advise that it is important to remember that the researcher still records only that which she/he chooses to record. Field notes however have a number of advantages over recordings. The notes are not as threatening as the recordings are to the participants, and the process of having to take notes keeps the investigator alert. These notes permit the investigator to record her/his own thoughts, thus lending greater clarity and understanding to how the mutual 'constructions' took place and how all members contributed to this. This has clearly been stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), "indeed, the advantages of field notes over recordings seems to us so great that we do not recommend recording except for unusual reasons" (p.241).

Initially, the investigator had planned for everything to be recorded on audio recordings. However, when the intrusion and disturbance that this would impose on the participants, the greater ecology and the natural context became evident, the investigator decided to work from field notes and only tape the final session. The decision to tape the final session may jar with that of not taping the preceding sessions. However, this was based on the ideal of having the final conversation as a more structured, semi-formal interview, while the preceding conversations were intended to be completely informal

and spontaneous in an attempt to preserve the natural context. One of the reasons the investigator felt reluctant to tape the preceding conversations was because of the intrusion of this extra 'gadget' into the initially uncertain context and 'research relationship'. These sessions served a very important function in providing an informal and non-threatening context for the establishment of a fruitful relationship between researcher and participants. However, in the final session, the relationship between researcher and participants was strong enough to endure the strain of a recorded, more formal session, without threatening the emergent themes, and thus a different 'angle' could to the already lived experience could be obtained. This final interview was a joint venture between investigator and participants, wherein a conscious decision was made to look at the mutually evolved meanings and co-constructions that arose within the 'research system' over the entirety of the time spent together. How these meanings had changed since the beginning of the study, as well as whether or not there was consensus concerning these meanings was discussed. By recording this final session, a (non-threatening) moment in our journey could be captured which reflected the themes which had spontaneously evolved from the previous conversations. This interview allowed us to 'look back' and 'take stock' of all the moments and meanings we had shared, providing a greater consensus concerning the themes that had emerged. It was a deliberate attempt at exploring the different issues of the past six months. We agreed to come to some sort of mutual understanding of our shared journey. The nature of this conversation therefore lent itself to being recorded.

On a simply practical level, when looking at the informal conversations, they were aimed at being unstructured as they centred on experiencing the daily routine at the stableyard with Dianne and Welcome Guest. Subsequently, much walking around was done, along with the stableyard chores and other activities while the conversations were taking place. Allowing the research to emerge, as was the aim with these conversations, was thus facilitated in this milieu. The conversations were held over a six-month period, with approximately one visit every two weeks to the stableyard. There were thus 12 meetings all in all. —

Conclusion

An important shift occurs in the sort of research that has been proposed. The burden of responsibility for determining the legitimacy of any particular way of constructing reality is now moved from the researcher to the reader. Atkinson and Heath (1987) believe that it is time to move research in a direction that more fully encourages readers as well as researchers to experience the research process. They believe the result is likely to be a renewed sense of community.

Atkinson and Heath (1987) also make the relevant point that to understand any realm of phenomena, we must start by identifying how it was constructed, that is, what distinctions underlie its creation. Research, therefore, becomes a matter of re-examining what one did to construct a particular reality.

CHAPTER 5

THE LONG AWAITED JOURNEY

“To be loved by a horse, or by any animal, should fill us with awe – for we have not deserved it” (Marion C. Garrety).

Introduction

The long awaited journey is the narration of the events which transpired between the inquirer and the participants in the study. This is a journey into the world of the unique human-animal relationship. The experiences that were gained enroute will now be shared with the reader. Each individual in the reading of this journey will share this experience, and will surely encounter a new and unique adventure.

From the exploratory study certain themes and ‘punctuation points’ gradually evolved. The essence of the shared conversations has subsequently been presented according to these thematic punctuations. Although the majority of the themes overlapped considerably in the conversations, they have been presented as logically following each other in a sequential manner. This was done in order to create the feeling of progression experienced by the members within the research system. An additional reason for this was to extract the constructions and meanings most dealt with by the research members in such a manner that illustrates the larger ‘picture’ around these themes.

At certain intervals noteworthy extracts from the recorded conversation are presented to highlight certain issues. The letter ‘A’ is used to indicate the investigator’s voice, and the letter ‘D’ to indicate Dianne’s voice (the human participant) in the dialogue. Welcome Guest’s communication (the animal participant) can unfortunately not be captured in this form within the text and has to be solely represented from the co-constructions of the other research member’s distinctions. The transcribed text stems purely from the final

recorded, semi-formal interview, which was an in-depth, mutual exploration of the previously, naturally evolved themes. The emphasis here was on looking back at the time spent together and reflecting on this. This text serves as a vivid illustration of the previously evolved themes that (the researcher believed) were divulged and developed earlier during the research. The text therefore serves to highlight the shared experiences and worldviews of the research system as viewed during the final ‘conversation’. The direct dialogue allows for the nature of the research to be directly appreciated by the reader. At certain intervals and where applicable the researcher has reported certain events in the first person. The reason for this being that a certain degree of richness of the researcher’s experience is lost if the narrative is related entirely in the third person. These personal thoughts and feelings of the investigator are presented in italics to illuminate more clearly the reflections of the investigator as separate from the co-constructions of the entire ‘research system’, although this distinction is of course artificial.

‘The Beginning’

The story that follows is quite a remarkable one, filled with many wondrous treasures along the way. This is the story that unfolded during the investigator’s explorations and which the investigator and participants mutually evolved upon the road travelled together. The travellers included the researcher and the participants, Dianne (the human participant) and Welcome Guest (the animal participant). Looking at a little background of the participants, Dianne is a successful and respected company secretary in her early forties. She works for a well-known company in a high profile, responsible job. Dianne is single and has no children. Welcome Guest is a magnificent, large 15-year-old thoroughbred horse. He is very well known and remembered in the racing world for his once famous racing career.

For the sake of the reader it may be useful to begin by describing the context where the research took place, as the writer may refer to them at later intervals. The conversations took place at the stableyard where Welcome Guest is stabled. This is where Dianne and

Welcome Guest spend every evening in each other's company, consequently the researcher felt that the human-animal relationship would best be observed within this natural context.

The stables are situated on a gentle slope which overlooks a small valley with a dam, and a river running through it. Beyond the river the gentle slope of a hill rolls up whereupon many of the horses graze during the day. This hill is termed the big paddock, and is often used for hacking. Hacking is a term used to describe 'riding out' of the schooling arena, this is usually in the countryside and is for exercise or enjoyment. The big paddock is often used for hacking and other fun activities with the horses. On the nearer side of the river, smaller paddocks are to be found where some of the geldings graze during the day. To the right of the stableyard when facing the river, is the yard owner's house and below the stables are two large schooling arenas and a lungeing ring, partially surrounded by tall trees. The upper schooling arena is a full sized, dressage arena with mirrors at the top end for rehearsing dressage. The larger, bottom arena is a jumping and training arena. Many of the younger people like to 'play' in this arena with their horses, galloping and cantering here as the size allows for this. The stable consists of a large, circular building with a small paddock on the inside of the building. The building has stables lining the inside, as well as the outside walls. One quarter of the original stable building has been converted into cottages which are rented out. Welcome Guest's stable is on the inner circle of the building nearer to the cottages. The cottages have a breathtaking view overlooking the dressage arena. To the left of the stableyard lies the groom's quarter as well as the lungeing ring. Nearby is a lush patch of green grass favoured by Welcome Guest, where many moments were spent observing and interacting with Welcome Guest and Dianne. Various tack and feed rooms are also situated within the main stable building.

During the first meeting, the investigator and participants made introductions, spent time getting to know one another and discussed the reason for the meeting. Ideas were shared as to what our mutual expectations of the each other would be within the study. Initially all members concerned were rather anxious as to what would happen, however

through conversation these fears were dealt with, allayed and expectations were laid open. The researcher made it clear that if the participants were prepared to partake in the study, there could be moments of intimate or potentially painful information. These moments could possibly spring forth from the conversations. The reason for this being that the researcher would want to look at the family system, the beliefs, and attitudes or understanding of certain core issues of the participants. The participants would have to be aware of these intentions and agree to them if they were to take part in the exploration. Furthermore, it was explained that the themes emerging from the investigation would be co-evolved, and would therefore require input from the participants in an active mode. Dianne responded to this quite positively and claimed that she was dedicated to this endeavour because she believed it to be an important issue which needed to be looked at and made more explicit. She stated quite adamantly on the first meeting that she held very strong feelings concerning the importance of animals and their relationship to people, and the way in which people think about this. She further said that she believed that animals are greatly misunderstood, and that if she could do anything in assisting to facilitate greater knowledge and understanding concerning this issue, then she would feel she had been of some use. Consequently, Dianne said she would not mind disclosing any sensitive information or becoming wholeheartedly involved in the investigation.

After quite a lengthy discussion around this issue, we went outside to the stables to meet the horse who brought such a look of adoration to Dianne's eyes. Welcome Guest is truly a showstopper. He stood proudly in his stable looking us all straight in the eye. On purely an aesthetic level the reason for her admiration and intensity was obvious. Welcome Guest is the epitome of the quintessential 'Black Beauty'. A pitch black thoroughbred gelding standing well over 16 hands high, large for a thoroughbred, with a small white star in the middle of his forehead and a white sock on his one hind leg. Welcome Guest stood tall in his stable with all the pride to match his beautiful good looks. However, right from the start it was obvious that this horse was more than merely good looks. He commanded a respect that was evident from the reactions he elicited from other people at the stableyard, who spoke of him with respect or admiration.

Dianne's feelings towards this magnificent animal shone through her like a radiance from beneath, that there was a relationship between them was undisputed. The way in which they greeted one another, he with his soft nicker and she talking to him as though he were her lifelong companion. They were such an unlikely pair, the magnificent ex-racehorse with the 'executive' lady-owner. What made the match even more unlikely, was the fact that Dianne did not really 'ride' this magnificent horse according to conventional riding standards, the 'yard-gossips' labeled her as someone who 'merely hacked'. Despite what most riders would call an obvious lack of competitive spirit in the riding sense (so emphasized in much of the riding world), the relationship was clear, and strong enough for any groom or layman to speculate about.

On that first day we did not go much beyond the stable area. On later occasions we walked the grounds extensively during the times we held our conversations, stopping at various places for welcome Guest to graze, depending on the activity that Dianne and Welcome Guest were engaged in. It was clear on that first afternoon already, that all members felt comfortable with one another, and that a 'fit' had emerged between us, and that all concerned were eager to continue with the proposed study. We scheduled a further date to commence our conversations.

After that first afternoon I knew that this was the place and the people with whom I wanted to do my case study. I had not thought that I would find a suitable case study so soon, but I was thoroughly intrigued. I had also not expected so many interesting aspects to jump out at me on the very first meeting of this person and her horse. I wanted to know more, and I wanted to know what lay underneath all of what I had seen and what this relationship was about. Why was she so completely dedicated to this horse, and how did he seem to understand exactly what she was thinking and feeling as evidenced by his reactions to her? How did this fit in with the rest of her life, and how and where did her family fit in with this close relationship? My answers came slowly, but I first had to get to know the history behind the relationship, which I will relate next.

Welcome Guest's Story – A Brief History

“If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principal difference between a dog [or horse] and a man.”
(Wilson, in Corson & O’Leary Corson, 1981, p.156).

After initially getting to know each other, the research members became more comfortable with one another, and the conversations rapidly progressed in the direction of discussing how Dianne and Welcome Guest’s life came to be shared in such an intimate manner. At first, time was spent discussing the more practical side of the relationship, i.e. how Dianne first came into contact with Welcome Guest. This is quite a remarkable story, which will be related as this provides a greater understanding of the emergent themes in evidence later in the investigation. In subsequent conversations we moved on to the more interactional aspects of the relationship.

Welcome Guest has technically been in Dianne’s life for a long time, albeit not in the physical sense. The story goes back to the days when Dianne followed the racing fraternity’s movements, as this was a hobby she shared with her mother. Initially it was her parents who began this hobby, however, with the death of her father in 1983, Dianne continued the family tradition in her father’s place as a support to her mother.

Dianne makes it quite clear in her story that she initially had no interest in horses. She explains that she never thought of them for riding purposes or as ‘pets’. In other words they were not personalized animals to her at all, they were always ‘jackpot’ numbers. As Dianne says, she was a ‘bird person’ and never thought or would have believed it possible that she may have any animal other than a bird, and especially not a horse. Her female Amazon Parrot, ‘Percy’, which Dianne had at the time and presently still has, was her sole animal-companion and they are extremely dedicated to each other. Thoughts of owning a horse and especially a well-known racehorse were the furthest from Dianne’s mind.

During the early 1980s Welcome Guest attracted Dianne's attention for the first time. This was due to all the attention and 'media hype' which he was receiving at the time. The focus was on him because suddenly, out of the blue, this striking, 'baby' thoroughbred was making headlines with all his incredible wins. Out of curiosity Dianne began to follow his career.

Welcome Guest's fame spread speedily as he won many of the most prestigious races in rapid succession. Unfortunately, with time he began to suffer terribly from his legs, primarily due to his youth and the incredible strain of racing. At Welcome Guest's tender age, his undeveloped bones could not take the strain of the continual training and racing, especially with the weight of such a large body on young, 'green' legs. Due to his great success in racing, the owners did not want acknowledge this problem, and continued pushing him to race even when his health had begun to deteriorate badly. Welcome Guest was continually on and off the track as his legs began to break down more often. Once off the training programme he would recover well, but as soon as any recovery was seen, an attempt to race him would again be made, until he once again broke down. Eventually, his trainer of the time refused to continue training him as he was too injured to be successful, and was suffering under all the pressure and painful medical procedures done on him in an attempt to rescue his ailing legs. At this time Welcome Guest was experiencing severe trauma due to all the painful medical procedures which were being done on his legs. These were all in an effort to save the once great racehorse, but the damage from excessive work on young, underdeveloped legs had been done, the damage was irreparable. In one of his last races Welcome Guest limped over the finish line in agony. Today, the scars of these procedures are still evident all the way down his legs, such as the scars from repeated pin-firing. Pin-firing is a procedure whereby metal pins are shot into the horse's legs, in an attempt at mending the damage done, this is usually done without anaesthetic. Despite all these problems, the owners eventually found a trainer who was prepared to continue training Welcome Guest without much concern for the severe costs to the horse's health and mind. This person replaced the original trainer. At that particular time in Welcome Guest's life he was known as an unaffectionate, difficult horse, some people may have even called him dangerous. This does not seem to

be too much of a surprise and is rather an obvious outcome considering the trauma that the horse was put through. Throughout all this time Dianne had been keeping track of Welcome Guest's movements, as she felt drawn to him because of what she describes as "inexplicable, and spiritual reasons".

After that last fateful race Welcome Guest disappeared off the racing scene completely. Dianne who had always managed to know Welcome Guest's whereabouts was deeply distressed by his disappearance, as horror stories concerning the fate of working horses when they are no longer considered to be of any use to their owners. Dianne, in a determined effort and attempt to find out about this horse's fate spoke to many people within the racing fraternity, hoping to gain information about the horse. Nobody was prepared to help her, they simply said that they did not know much. Many people treated her with disdain that she should have the presumption to inquire after this horse and his whereabouts, some people were blatantly hostile towards her. Eventually in a desperate attempt, and after many months of searching, Dianne phoned the trainer's office who had first trained Welcome Guest (this was the same person that had refused to race him when he began to break down). In what can be seen as quite a coincidence (or miracle), this trainer had just come into his office for five minutes that day to pick up the last of his belongings as he had resigned from his position. It was during these five minutes that Dianne phoned and caught him as he was on his way out of the office, the trainer was quite incredulous about this. It was from this person that Dianne finally received the precious information she had been searching for. Dianne was told that Welcome Guest had been on a stud farm where an attempt at healing his legs once again made. He further informed her that Welcome Guest would be returning to Gosforth Park. This time however it was not to race, but to act as the lead horse in the parade ring leading the parade of racehorses before the race took place. Because he was so good looking, the person in charge of the parade had taken him over from the previous owners, as it was believed that he would be a good 'showstopper'. Once more Welcome Guest would be returning to Gosforth Park and the racetrack. It was within this environment and setting, that Dianne had her first physical contact with Welcome Guest after the many years of admiring him from afar and following his career.

At Gosforth Park the relationship between human and horse first began. Dianne in another bold attempt, phoned the new owner expressing her absolute admiration and concern for this horse. The owner in a benevolent manner invited her to come and visit Welcome Guest. It was in this manner that Dianne and Welcome Guest finally got to know one another. Dianne describes this first meeting as being an experience of a life time, she was so nervous that a friend had to drive her to Gosforth Park. After the initial visit, Dianne returned to Gosforth Park and the visits began to take place on regular intervals. This continued for some time in quite a comfortable manner until the owner of the time started to resent the weekly visits. This resentment stemmed from the fact that Welcome Guest seemed to prefer Dianne to the other people he worked with. He would be much quieter and accommodating when Dianne was nearby than generally with other people. Dianne says that this was not surprising as she actually took time to communicate with him. Further resentment toward Dianne from the owner became evident. As Dianne was becoming a known face around the racetrack, the regulars began speaking about Welcome Guest as if he were Dianne's horse. This resentment was magnified by the fact that Welcome Guest was often difficult with this owner, resisting what was asked of him, or stubbornly refusing to enter into the parade ring as the lead horse. The stubborn side seemed less prominent in the presence of Dianne because he probably trusted this relationship more. In an unfortunate accident, the owner fell off another horse while 'work-riding'. She broke her neck in the accident, and later died in hospital due to complications. The owner's family was traumatized and bitter because of her untimely death, and they wanted to get rid of any horses which they felt were problem horses. Welcome Guest was one of the first on their list to go. He was actually offered to Dianne at one point, probably because of the connection she seemed to have with him. However, Dianne says that at the time, she did not even consider taking Welcome Guest as a feasible option because she did not have the financial means to look after a horse, and she furthermore knew nothing about taking caring of a horse. Dianne had also never imagined she could or would own even an ordinary horse, let alone 'the great Welcome Guest'. When Dianne could not take Welcome Guest, a different owner was eventually found for him, who took him to a plot which became his new home. The new owner had children that wanted to ride Welcome Guest (Welcome Guest, also

affectionately called 'Wellie' by Dianne, happens to love children). It was obvious to everyone that Dianne was much more at ease with Welcome Guest than most people were, this man therefore extended the invitation for Dianne to visit Welcome Guest and assist with his care, while helping he children to ride him. In this manner, Dianne managed to stay near to Welcome Guest, even though he had once again moved.

Unfortunately, this too was not a happy home for Welcome Guest. In a sense it was a blessing in disguise for Dianne and Welcome Guest that he did not get treated well, as this situation to a large degree facilitated the strengthening of the bond between them. The neglect which Welcome Guest endured was perhaps due to the fact that the owner purchased him primarily for prestige and 'spectator value', and when this wore off he no longer cared much for the horse's well-being. Welcome Guest, being not the easiest horse to work with would have shattered this man's images of grandeur rather rapidly. Ultimately, the owner's financial difficulties also added to the neglect and abuse which the horse suffered.

It was through Dianne's continual visits to Welcome Guest that she managed to help him through the period of neglect which he suffered. This difficult time for both Dianne and Welcome Guest, taught Dianne how to care for a horse in many different ordinary and crisis situations. If Dianne had not cared for Welcome Guest at that time, nobody else would have and he may have died. In caring for him, she was learning about horse-management, as well as building a stronger relationship with Welcome Guest. The neglect from the owners continued however, to the point where if the horse had injuries they would be neglected until they became septic. It was at these times that Dianne took over complete care of the horse even though he did not belong to her. Dressing wounds and pulling off ticks became accepted, daily activities for Dianne. A further problem arose as Welcome Guest began to starve from the tiny amount of food he was being fed. Dianne tried to supplement what little food he got by buying him carrots in bulk, some weeks she would buy up to eight kilograms of carrots. Unfortunately this did not even touch sides in keeping such a large animal healthy, and he began to waste away. An animal of such dimensions needs vast amounts of food and grass everyday to keep alive.

The lack of shelter, resulting in Welcome Guest continually standing in the sun, day in and day out also began to take its toll. Welcome Guests' beautiful black coat became damaged from the sun, and turned to a faded, patchy dullness. There were areas on his legs that even began to turn a whitish-orangey colour from the continual sunburn. These events continued until Dianne could no longer stand by and watch as her companion suffered and began to die a slow, painful death. She decided to take matters into her own hands in an attempt to save his life. In a decidedly radical, but understandable action, Dianne went onto the property with a horsebox and promptly removed or 'stole' Welcome Guest. Dianne was assisted in this by a friend of the family and was not totally alone. From there he was taken to a different stable yard under a false name which was purely a precaution, as it was evident that nobody would have recognized him in any case in the condition he was in.

Once at the new stableyard, a vet was called out to see the horse under the false name that was given. In a strange twist of fate, this vet turned out to be the same vet who had treated Welcome Guest for all those years on the racing track, and who had always been very fond of him. He took one look at the horse and immediately exclaimed that this was not 'Free at Last' (his false name), but that it was Welcome Guest and, "what the hell had happened to him?" He was furious at the extent of the neglect, and that this kind of abuse had been allowed to happen at all. He advised Dianne to take photos of Welcome Guest so that she would have some form of evidence if she needed it, as the owners were already threatening her with legal action. Extensive treatment with hormones and supplements was needed at the time to save the horse's life as he was emaciated and incredibly weak. His condition was so poor that the vet believed he literally only had days left to live, and that if Dianne had not taken him when she did, he would have died shortly after. As matters turned out, the owners never bothered to prosecute Dianne, possibly because they knew of the seriousness of the horse's condition when he had been removed from their property. Today Welcome Guest is recognized as Dianne's horse.

With time, as the horse's physical crises were overcome the relationship between them moved on to new horizons. The physical healing process took a long time though, and Welcome Guest had to be put on steroids and needed regular medical attention. In actual

fact it took quite a few months for him to return to complete health. This is how events developed leading to the two of them into sharing an ever deepening relationship. During this period the emotional and psychological bonds between the two strengthened and a firm foundation of trust was established. This changing relationship included short periods of riding as Welcome Guest began to require exercise. The riding fostered more affectionate interaction and demanded even greater trust than before. Dianne, being in her early forties and never having ridden horses before experienced the riding as quite a stressful experience initially. Any person who knows horses well, will know that the minute a rider sits in the saddle a horse can sense the faintest twinge of fear or stiffness in the rider's body, thoughts and attitude. This may be picked up in the slightest muscle tenseness, the smell of fear, or possibly even in an 'aura' of fear or tension given off by a tense rider. To an intuitive animal not relying on verbal language, these cues seem to be obvious. This caused a great problem and challenge for Dianne who was understandably tense and anxious in the beginning with her riding. Dianne knew that she had to face this challenge and overcome her anxiety for their relationship to grow. Her instructor also urged her to be bolder with riding and to take more advanced steps, but fear and lack of confidence caused major obstacles in this area. Welcome Guest sensing the tension in Dianne, would respond in a like manner to her, triggering her to in turn stiffen even more in anticipation of his next move. Each ride where fear was present, the horse acted out and caused problems with silly behaviour. This acting out behaviour made Dianne even more fearful and so a vicious cycle began where neither could read the behaviour of the other clearly, or what they were communicating. Although many of the early obstacles in the relationship had been overcome due to the established trust, the difficulty in reading each other's evolving language was an obstacle and there was often misunderstanding in the initial stages between the two of them. Even though a communication system was evolving between the two of them, Dianne admits that she did not initially realize that they were in the process of sculpting their own communication system. She could not always recognize this 'new language' that flowed between the two of them. The initial difficulty Dianne experienced when riding and the lack of trust from Dianne for Welcome Guest when on his back, highlighted for her many of her own personal issues. When looking at these issues they seemed to center around self-worth, and identity within

relationships. These themes will be discussed in the section dealing with Dianne's personal feelings and struggles.

Not understanding the communication between her horse and herself caused much distress and confusion for Dianne. This was partly because the horse that everybody had said was so unaffectionate began to show deep affection for Dianne. At times though, the relationship could be very difficult with moments of intense conflict. This sharp contrast did not always make sense to Dianne, and often caused her to suffer much distress in questioning what she was doing wrong. It was at this point in their relationship that the investigator entered into the system. The incidents related here as background to the exploration have obviously been abbreviated for the sake of the dissertation, and in actuality are much more complex and detailed than described here. To do these events justice an entire study would need to be dedicated to them. The investigator and participants can in retrospect comment and punctuate these events as significant moments. Other moments or punctuation points may have seemed more relevant or significant to another investigator.

With this massive change in Dianne's life, that is acquiring a horse, many other things changed in her life. She spent a great deal of time with him due to her dedication to him, and less time on previous pastimes such as time spent with the family or with other friends. Her family system experienced certain perturbations, as did other systems in her life. The dynamics and changes within this family system and the moulding of this system with the human-animal relationship will now be considered.

The Relationship's Role in the Family System

Our conversations progressed to include Dianne's family and her relationship with Welcome Guest within this familial context. Time was spent discussing the family system and traditions surrounding Dianne and the background from which she came. The inquirer was curious to see in what manner this animal member impacted upon the wider

system and shaped it, and in what manner the wider system shaped and impacted upon the human-animal relationship. The inquirer further wanted to investigate to what degree the family system shaped the context for the human-animal relationship to fruitfully take root in.

The concepts and meanings that evolved from the conversations were truly enlightening. Perhaps at this point in the research it would be beneficial to take stock of the historical happenings within the family system and other significant systems before discussing the patterns and themes which emerged from investigating this system.

Dianne comes from a close knit Jewish family. Presently the family consists of Dianne, Dianne's animals, Percy the Amazon parrot and Welcome Guest (Dianne firmly believes they form part of her family), her younger brother, and her mother who partly share this belief with her. They are a family that can be considered as relatively traditional concerning certain of the Jewish cultural beliefs. They are not however a strictly observant family in the religious sense. What became evident in the discussions, is that they are a family with strong beliefs as to how things should and should not be done, with relatively fixed ideas as to what is considered acceptable or not. The rules and meanings within this family are therefore well established and not always open to 'news of difference', or to being challenged. One example of this the belief that Jewish children do not live away from home unless they are married. This is clearly seen in that both children in the family are living at home with their mother. Dianne's younger brother actually moved back home after his divorce. There also appears to be a tradition of firm 'family secrets'. These are not open for discussion within the family, and are therefore overtly denied. In actual fact, all members are very much conscious of these 'unspoken' things on some level. These will be discussed further on in the narrative.

The nuclear family has remained intact following the death of Dianne's father several years ago due to cancer. This situation is partly due to the fact that Dianne is unmarried and her brother is divorced, and therefore both live at home (home actually being Dianne's apartment). It is also partly due to the fact that Dianne took over the role of

sole provider for the family after her father died. This came about because her father requested her to promise that she would look after her mother following his death. Dianne also feels it is her responsibility and duty to look after her mother. This was framed in our discussions as a deep sense of loyalty and commitment to her family, and that if she did not look after them, nobody else would or could. Dianne's brother has moved back into her apartment recently, this causes a great deal of distress for her because Dianne and her appear to very incompatible when it comes to the practicalities of living together. Because of Dianne's strong sense of family commitment and loyalty though she would never turn him away. She says of this situation, "where my mother goes, my brother goes." Dianne believes that her brother is not fully capable of looking after himself because of the way in which their mother protected him when he was growing up. This makes it especially difficult for her to ever be harsh or firm with him. Except for the period when he was married he has always lived at home with his sister and mother, and has subsequently always been taken care of. Dianne's idea about her brother being overly dependent seems warranted given the circumstances. He does not contribute much to the upkeep of the household, even though he works as a photographer. He will on occasion buy something small as a contribution. This puts additional strain on Dianne as she has to virtually single handedly cope with the expenses of three people. Dianne, being the current sole provider is of course seen as the strong one in the family, the one who always copes and who will solve everyone's problems and accommodate everybody. She is ultimately seen as being responsible for everyone. Although Dianne is not happy with her family's rigid definition of her, the definition seems quite 'stuck' and Dianne has not been able to change this. The brother's assumed position of incompetence appears to strengthen this definition in service of the larger family dynamics. If the family had to admit that he was more competent than they thought, and that perhaps Dianne was at times the vulnerable one, then they may just have to look at a whole gamut of deeper issues which would surely be uncomfortable for them. This is partly illustrated by the 'family secret' myth, where one does not confront the pains of the past but rather denies them.

One such 'secret' which is denied within the larger family system, is the often strained relationship between Dianne and her mother, and that the brother is 'favoured' by the mother. Often there is tension within the home because of this dynamic between Dianne and her mother. This relationship has been so for many years, Dianne recalls feeling misunderstood or marginalized by her mother ever since her childhood years, but her experience can find no voice within this family system, as these experiences of hers are denied and 'absorbed' into the 'family secret'. Despite the tension in the family, the brother and the mother do get along and are very close, as is evidenced by the mother's overt concern for her son. Dianne's brother accepts this concern by living up to the helpless role which seems to be an easy role for him to fulfill. He does at times strain against this and displays irritability at his mother's strong sense of protectiveness. However outright rebellion and dominance do not seem to be roles which are flexible enough for him to manifest at this point in his life. The father was the parent who was closer to Dianne and her primary support. This affection was never openly displayed within the family due to the tension resulting between Dianne's parents from such an overt expression of affection towards Dianne. This support from Dianne's father remained on a much more covert and deeper level. Although the sense of closeness evident in the relationship between son and mother is not present in the relationship between daughter and mother, there has always been a strong sense of protectiveness between mother and daughter. This has of course made the relationship even more binding, and strengthened the already existing patterns. It is possible that the mother makes more overt and explicit her relationship with her son in an attempt to balance the 'silent strength' that bound father and daughter, and still does this now even though the father is no longer present. The father remains a large figure in the memory of all the family members as seen from the continuation of family traditions which were held dear to him, such as the horse racing. These continued traditions serve in a sense as markers, cherishing his memory, and are a resilient factor within this system.

What Dianne reports experiencing throughout her childhood and adult years is a sense of being responsible and loyal to this family, yet not really belonging to them or being acknowledged by them. Her father tried to give her a sense of belonging, but it was

always in a silent manner, as he did not want to draw out favourites in the family. It seems as though the father also did not have much voice in the family, and Dianne as the breadwinner filling his shoes fits into this silent role too. These silent family members appear to make more impact on the family via practical means. This feeling of not quite belonging in her family expanded for Dianne over the years, to encompass feelings of isolation and ultimately inadequacy. With time Dianne began to see herself as unworthy and at times totally useless or a waste to society. It is possible that these feelings bound her even more strongly to her family, as this was a context where her role was clearly defined even though it disqualified her competence and worth on many levels. In other contexts such as her work, Dianne is competent, highly respected by colleagues and generally admired as being a hard and dedicated worker. Dianne is very loyal to the company that she works for as this is a value she strongly embraces. Despite this she perceived herself as somehow undeserving, and definitely someone without voice or rights. In this sense the work and home contexts served to reinforce the belief system that Dianne held of herself, which was that she had to be productive and competent at work to provide for those dependent on her at home. The pressure and massive responsibility springing forth from those two primary contexts in her life seem obvious. *This raises the inevitable question of where is there a space for Dianne, and who is going to give her this space, where does she have a voice? From the conversations which followed, it appeared that this very necessary space was probably fulfilled by her relationships with her animals, more and more I was beginning to appreciate the significance of these creatures in her life.*

Looking further at the work context, it is important to mention that Dianne's work place has had to, to a certain degree accommodate and allow for her relationship with Welcome Guest. This is in the sense that Dianne avoids jobs that demand much travelling, as she would then not be able to spend much time with her horse. The distance of her office from the stableyard is also always important to her, as well as whether or not her boss has an understanding for her commitment this important relationship. These may be considered by some to be serious limitations, but to Dianne it is part of the uniqueness of the relationship. It is also not a one sided thing, as Welcome Guest forms part of the very

essence that sustains, supports and nurtures Dianne, enabling her to survive in her work situation which is often very stressful. On a very basic and logistical level, as well as a deeper, supportive level, Dianne's relationship with Welcome Guest has profoundly influenced her work system.

An integral part of the family-system not yet mentioned, is in fact Dianne's parrot Percy. Percy is a parrot who was imported directly from the Amazon jungle and has been with Dianne for approximately 12 years. Dianne's family would certainly admit that the parrot is part of their family-system. Many of the family activities are organized around the parrot. The family is remarkably good at keeping up the standards that are demanded from such a delicate bird. Many of the complicated activities organized around the parrot are for her health. For instance, keeping room temperature constant in the house is vital to her health. This is achieved by not putting on heaters in all the rooms and by not opening all the windows especially near the parrot. Certain times are mealtimes for her and these are adhered to strictly, and specific types of food are specially cooked for her. Percy does in fact have a very special diet which she has to adhere to. The many activities around her upkeep seem to be fairly well tolerated by the other family members, where she is concerned their input is necessary in her wellbeing. Percy seems to fulfill the role of everybody's child in the family. Although her loyalties have for years been only with Dianne, the other family members like to spoil her and cosset her as though she was 'the child' in the house, especially when Dianne is not around. At these times she will enjoy the affection from other members, but as soon as Dianne returns she makes as if she wants nothing to do with the other members. Lately however, Dianne's mother has struck up a particularly close relationship with Percy, possibly due to the fact that she spends more time at home with the parrot. This raises the question of whether Percy possibly fills the space that a grandchild may have filled for Dianne's mother. Percy is however never openly affectionate to Dianne's mother when Dianne is in the vicinity and makes her first loyalties to Dianne clearly known. Perhaps Percy has learned to mirror Dianne's very strong sense of loyalty. Percy certainly has the ability to make everyone notice her when she feels her needs are not being met. This family member does have a loud voice within the family and makes sure she is heard.

The bird having a 'voice' in the family is in fact a very interesting theme as most of the time Dianne does not feel that she is given any space in her flat for her own needs. This is important considering that the apartment is in fact Dianne's place, and that the other family members live with her. However, when it comes to her animals there is a certain amount of 'acquiescence' from the other family members in respecting her space and needs. Dianne stresses though that acknowledgment of her animal's needs came with time, and a struggle with her family to accept the importance of the animals first ensued. This also appears to be the case with her horse, although the family has adapted themselves to the routine around the horse too. Granted this did not seem to come with any great ease, but the fact of the matter remains that Dianne only seems to have her space respected and acknowledged when it comes to her relationships with her animals. As far as the family dynamics are concerned then, the animals play a very important role. They give her a voice pertaining to certain issues. While the other members in the family may not respect Dianne's space concerning her privacy, or use of the bathroom or television, they would not dare impose on the space or time taken by her animals, or that she shares with her animals. It appears that through them then, her family acknowledges her in an indirect way.

It thus becomes evident that Dianne comes from a system where new information is not always responded to with enthusiasm, and may take a while to shape itself into the accepted system and 'status quo'. It is then into this system that Welcome Guest entered when he became Dianne's horse. As previously stated, the family system resisted the introduction of Welcome Guest quite dramatically in the beginning with much complaining over the time and money he would take up. However, he has become a firmly accepted part of Dianne's life and partly of the other members' lives, with the other family members often expressing great concern for his well being especially when he suffers from his old racing injuries. Even Dianne's brother who does not share her passion for Welcome Guest expresses concern when he is in pain.

Looking at the family system, it can then be said that in a sense Welcome Guest has filled the space in the family where Dianne feels she does not have a voice, recognition or belonging. As she has said on numerous occasions, “He is not my pet, or animal, or even my child as some people call him. This horse is my partner, he shares everything I go through”. It would appear that Welcome Guest wields equal if not more power in this family, than any of the other members. He is one of the central pivots of the system. He is the one who maintains the balance at home, which is often ‘off balance’ with the alliance between mother and son, in this sense keeping Dianne ‘sane’ and allied with a significant someone too. As Dianne is the key element in this family’s survival, so too is Welcome Guest then a key element to the family’s survival. It is almost as if on some level the family sense this fact intuitively, as they all show tremendous respect for this relationship. If Dianne is back too late from the stables, she and her mother will often have conflict about this because her mother is concerned and protective. However, the conflict is never framed in terms of “that horse that kept you away”, it is rather aimed at Dianne for being ‘late’, or at some other person who may have kept her from coming home sooner.

With time though, the family’s ideas have changed from seeing Welcome Guest as just a horse to including him as a member of the family. Here is an extract that illustrated this change:

A: “that’s incredible, so you think that they actually do acknowledge...”

D: “Mm, they have.”

A: “that he’s not just an a, how would I put it, look I know they are past the ‘pet stage’, but that he’s sort of well a ‘border family member’ or a subsidiary, or you know a sideline family member.”

D: “No, he’s 100% part of that family, because that’s how its evolved.”

A: “and now the behaviour in fact is organized around him to accommodate him.”

D: “yes, yes it is.”

A: “you come here, and meals are around that.”

D: “and there’s no complaints.”

A: “and there’s no problem.”

D: “ja, accepts it now.”

A: “mm, but it took.”

D: “it took....”

A: “time, ja.”

D: “they needed time to understand his worth.”

A: “yes, so everyone’s meanings have changed.”

D: “yes.”

A: “about what he actually is, and I think they will still change.”

D: “I think its changing....”

A: “I think it will never stop.”

D: “as it goes along its changing all the time.”

This extract further serves to illustrate the evolving nature of the relationship and definitions thereof within the family. The acceptance that the family shows for Welcome Guest will continue to evolve and change as the family flow with the process of defining and redefining their relationships.

Dianne’s Refuge

With time, Dianne and the investigator began discussing deeper and more personal issues, especially as they related to the relationship concerning Welcome Guest. This came about due to probes from the investigator concerning her feelings, ideas and beliefs as to an animal’s intrinsic worth and role in a therapeutic capacity, over and above all the other more obvious benefits of animal-companionship. When the inquirer first questioned Dianne on her ideas and beliefs concerning the intrinsic therapeutic value of Welcome Guest, she replied that she did believe this relationship to be therapeutic. However, when an attempt was made to discover what exactly she meant by this, why she said this, or what her experience of this was, the answer seemed difficult to come by, apparently embedded in many layers of other experiential meaning. These layers slowly

unfolded during the subsequent discussions. However, the root of the answer lay at the heart of the beliefs that Dianne held about herself.

It was in this manner then, that Dianne came to speak of the many personal beliefs that she held about herself, which began to change as her relationship evolved with Welcome Guest, and as the meanings within the research system evolved. One of the first times this subject was touched on, the following pertinent issues came up which were discussed in greater depth at a later stage. A short extract representing these themes is presented. The extract stems from the final interview as has been mentioned wherein these themes were revisited and the mutual experience of them shared between research members.

A: "How would you describe what he is to you?"

D: "He gives me a purpose, he is my lifeline. Before he came into my life I felt that I was the cosmos's biggest mistake, not worthy of anything, with no right to be here and definitely with no purpose. Not even the right to take up space, or to use other's oxygen."

A: "Have you then changed since you first got him?"

D: "The person who existed before he came into my life is now dead – non-existent. That's how much I have changed."

A: "Can you explain to me what exactly it was that changed?"

D: "The day I stole Welcome Guest, my focus changed from myself to him. When I stole him, it felt like I had no right, this changed [ultimately] because what I was doing was right – to save his life, even though the action was wrong. His need was greater than what was 'right' and my own fears. I could put myself aside for him."

A: "Why would you risk all this for an 'animal'?"

D: "He would die if not. At that time, what I believed of myself, and what everybody else believed did not matter. It's a 'relationship thing', that's why it is therapeutic. This horse gives me self-respect and dignity. He relies on me and cares for me. I am necessary for his survival."

A: "So he makes you feel needed, wanted and special. But do you in any [other] way rely on him?"

D: “What I get from him is dependent on my effort and what I put in – this is not just a one way relationship.”

This conversation illustrates how the relationship blossomed with time. The primary theme emerging from this, and a noteworthy point, is that this is about ‘relationship’ for Dianne. ‘Relationship’ implying the mutual exchange of meaningful experiences and interaction. It is a relationship where respect and trust must be earned on both sides, and where two living creatures both come into the relationship with a host of past experiences, influencing and shaping their current interactions, thoughts about self and one another, as well as their way of being. Once it was acknowledged that the relationship was important, both parties could evolve to higher orders of meaning with one another as they co-evolved the [changing] definition of the relationship.

Another pertinent point taken from this extract concerns the issue of caring for Welcome Guest. Dianne says that Welcome Guest relies on her and that she is necessary for his survival. Initially in the exploration both participant and inquirer believed that this aspect of caring and providing was one of the fundamental cornerstones of the relationship. With time it became evident that the relationship was about so much more. The sense of being needed and having a purpose seemed to be one of the logical conclusions as to why this relationship is so binding and fulfilling to Dianne. Obviously when her self-worth was as low as she describes it, having something/someone who needed her and whom she had to nurture would have made sense. Currently though, Dianne has moved light years from that initial stance in the relationship. This is evidenced in the discussion of ‘relationship’.

Ultimately one of the primary themes emerging from this discussion of relationship between the two of them, was Dianne’s feeling that the tables turned at some point in the relationship between herself and Welcome Guest. Initially, as previously mentioned and evidenced from Welcome Guest’s story, he was the needy one in the relationship. He was standing at death’s door, needing food, care and medical help to survive. He needed affection, or to re-learn affection and trust in somebody, and in humanity at large. *I say*

re-learn affection because I believe that every living creature is born with the capacity to experience this type of 'affection' or belonging,, and that it is only through trauma and abuse that this inherent openness to 'being connected' is closed. Dianne was the person who was willing and able to give him these things. Initially therefore, the focus of the whole relationship was on Welcome Guest's most basic needs for survival. All of *his* physical needs and problems were sorted out first, followed by his emotional needs which had been neglected for many years. The emphasis or definition of the relationship was that of a needy animal and Dianne as the provider, the caring, nurturant, independent, strong one. This was also a mirror of her role in her family.

This role highlighted Dianne's belief that she did not deserve to have her needs acknowledged, and that she was only worthy in the strong, protective, giving role, consequently her low self-esteem was further emphasized. Dianne's negative beliefs about herself were magnified by another dynamic which has not previously been mentioned. Dianne was in a long-term relationship for well over ten years. Although they were engaged this was always a difficult relationship, wherein he often broke her down emotionally, eventually he broke off their engagement. This all magnified the negative feelings and patterns of her childhood that were already well entrenched in her view of herself. The negative beliefs Dianne held about herself endured for some time in her relationship with Welcome Guest, and even today still arise at times of stress or vulnerability. However, Dianne has become aware of this being a debilitating belief, and makes a conscious effort to deal with this. This was spoken about extensively during the study. One of the ways in which new meaning developed around this for her, was in the idea that perhaps she *is* worthy, as only someone of worth could possibly own, understand and bond with such a magnificent creature as Welcome Guest. *Welcome Guest's magnificence is a commonly accepted thing among those who know him.* This new idea and belief system gained life through discussion of numerous stories. One such story was related where Dianne told of a riding accident where she fell off Welcome Guest. Bystanders of this incident told her that the horse leaped out of the way to avoid falling on her or stepping on her, doing an apparently unnatural twist in the air to accomplish this. In conversation, this incident would be quoted along with other

incidences as evidence that Welcome Guest does try to 'look after' her and 'protect her' when she is on his back, illustrating the love and respect held by him for her. From this, feelings of worth and acceptance of self could be constructed. This new meaning became a great incentive for Dianne to overcome her own negative beliefs concerning herself.

This theme further expanded to include the idea that the horse looks after her, but that a part of her still fears him, and it is herein that her struggle of self-acceptance is crystallized and symbolized. By fearing him, it was said that she deprives him of her trust, but that he gives freely to her in 'protecting' her while she is on his back, therefore the trust could be construed as a one-sided effort from him. In a sense the lack of trust was then an insult to Welcome Guest, giving rise to much of his 'otherwiseness' or difficult nature that could be misconstrued as aggravation when he was being ridden. The belief about him protecting her also sprung up from the fact that this horse readily threw other people off his back when he seemed for certain of his own reasons to not want them on his back. This behaviour from him had never happened with Dianne, and we ascribed it to their unique relationship, their trust and understanding. To improve their relationship and the exhaustion from some of the struggles experienced when Welcome Guest was in a 'so-called mood'. Dianne and the inquirer came to the conclusion that she would have to overcome all the negative beliefs about herself, as Welcome Guest picked up on these and reacted accordingly. This could be seen as his form of communication whereby he gave her feedback as to how she was relating to him. This began a long and painful process whereby Dianne looked at these beliefs and how they kept operating within her life and family. Perhaps more importantly though, was the expectation (unknown to us) of how Welcome Guest would respond to Dianne examining these beliefs and changing her attitude toward him.

This shift began subtly with what seemed to be 'Welcome Guest's moods'. It often seemed that the horse would be very pleased to see her and at later intervals he would become 'cranky'. During this time he might flatten his ears in irritation, grind his teeth, stamp his foot or try to [mock] bite Dianne or some other [innocent] bystander, usually often the researcher. The depth of Dianne's belief that she was somehow inferior and

totally unworthy compared to other people repeatedly came up, causing guilt, blame and a host of other emotions. At times when Dianne was having more conflict at home than usual (there was usually conflict at home), these beliefs would be highlighted and the horse invariably seemed to be more unpredictable and moody. This strengthened the already existing meaning that he was responding and communicating to what she was sending out and feeling.

Welcome Guest's injured legs proved to be another area that slotted into this new construction of self-worth. The injury had always been framed as a great pity and loss of a magnificent horse, however, framed between us it was a blessing. This was because without the injury he would have never been retired and Dianne would never have had the opportunity to keep him. By working with these themes and the already established basis of deep affection for one another Dianne slowly learnt to trust him when she was on his back. We would speak about how when she thought for instance, of a work situation while riding and became upset about it, he would immediately respond and become difficult. But when she felt she had more confidence, he would respond very well to this, being quite accepting of any commands and stopping instantly if she felt nervous and asked him to stop. It was as if he could gauge her state of mind and sense of self-worth, and then respond positively to her progress, or negatively to her negative beliefs about herself.

This process with time gave her confidence and her riding dramatically improved, however the problems in the stables seemed to persist. Often during our sessions together we would speak of her troubles at work as she experienced particularly difficult times in the work context. When she came to the stables with a certain disposition it was as if the horse would immediately stamp his foot and tell her that her mood was unacceptable to him. This led to the idea that he did not appreciate the way she thought about life, especially when she was feeling very negative. During some of the conversations what was particularly interesting was that he would be in a fine mood, but if certain subjects came up and were discussed in a negative manner he would flatten his ears and try to bite one of us. This may have led the casual bystander to believe that this

is merely a bad tempered horse who always tries to bite people and 'pull-faces'. *There were times when I struggled to understand his moods.* However with time and observation, it became evident that this horse was doing certain things in response to specific behaviours from her, such as responding in certain ways to certain subjects, such as if a negative conversation arose he would become irritable. What was interesting though, was that if she walked away from him during such a moment/mood he would crane his neck around to look out of the stable door, prick up his ears and search for where she was going with no trace of aggravation. The look of expectation on his face being undeniable, and sometimes he would give an affectionate nicker in anticipating her return. This was not in response to food or any other tempting stimulus, merely her presence.

Instances such as these led us as the 'investigating team' to eventually assume that Welcome Guest was communicating with us in one of the ways he knew how, and he was in actual fact enriching the relationship by expressing his emotions and opinions. Dianne's focus subsequently changed from viewing Welcome Guest's moods or reactions as being resentment of her to being communication. This was a major turning point for both of them, as resentment from him, kept her in the 'worthless' position which she often experienced in the family setting, thus reinforcing old, negative patterns. The idea that he was communicating, introduced a whole new aspect and depth to the relationship as Dianne was no longer 'saviour' or 'victim', she was just in a meaningful relationship. This experience of being in a meaningful relationship led to the construct of Welcome Guest taking on the role of Dianne's partner, not her pet, child or any other 'unequal' relationship as she puts it. He fulfils the role of a confidant and a support system which is so sorely lacking at home and not filled by a any human partner. Dianne knows she can go to the stables and find what she experiences as an uplifting, real relationship there.

This evolution of meaning, which transpired in relation to these themes was not predetermined or aimed at by myself, they evolved completely naturally, as the aim of the study was merely to investigate the meanings of the system, not change it. These changed

meanings resulted from the shared co-constructions within the conversations, and followed their own path.

Transcending the Physical

The relationship between Dianne and Welcome Guest not surprisingly also spans across her spiritual beliefs. How these tie up to everyday things which are seemingly mundane such as 'animal-relationships' were looked at, and the influence that these beliefs have on this relationship.

What we came to see together was that Dianne's spiritual beliefs affected her relationships in an integral manner. In a sense, spiritual or religious beliefs can be described as a cornerstone of a person's epistemology, and ultimately epistemology will determine how you think and behave [in relation to all living creatures]. Looking at Dianne's spiritual beliefs it became obvious that she has a deep reverence for all living creatures. An innate respect and integrity for them and in handling them is apparent, which is not evident to such a degree in many other people. Unwittingly and unknowingly, it is as if she embodies an ecosystemic epistemology when interacting with animals. Her deep respect and understanding of ecological and contextual processes around her allows her to appreciate the balance which nature is ever trying to maintain, and simultaneously she can sense the finer nuances and patterns in the creatures around her and in herself. This attitude was one of the things that allowed Dianne to shift from the belief that Welcome Guest perhaps resented her, to the idea that he was communicating important information. This 'holistic' base from which she experiences things, leads her to treat animals in a way which would perhaps be foreign to most people, except perhaps those who have devoted a lifetime to animals and understand all their innate needs and subtle communications. This all revolves around her belief of all things being interconnected not only on a physical level but also on a spiritual level, and that every action of hers does and will have a reaction. Her reverence for animals is

however not in fear of this belief but out of true understanding of it and dedication to those relationships of which she is only a part.

Dianne and Welcome Guest appear to have an unusually strong bond. Perhaps accounting partially for the incredible commitment, trust and loyalty between them as well as the embedded struggles, are the spiritual beliefs which are imbedded in this relationship. This ties up with Dianne's belief that all creatures are continually evolving spiritually and physically, and that it is only through the learning school of meaningful relationships that we can aid one another in the struggle for evolution. This was one of the primary constructs that emerged and which we worked with. In other words that through the work that humans and animals do, we mutually aid each other's evolution, and perhaps find therapeutic value in the work we do.

During our final conversations we had to agree that a one-sided evolutionary process with humans leading the way, smacked of a certain kind of arrogance, and is not in keeping with the true nature of reciprocity and complementarity. However, as the research system unfolded, we were forced to change this construction to one where we acknowledged that the evolutionary process is a two-way thing. Even more than that though, we felt that perhaps through the mutual learning experienced in the human-animal relationship we as humans were 'being evolved' more by the animals than they by us. This is because it was us who had to let go of our old lenses and assumptions in putting our limitations onto the animals. The animal may well take on the limitation that the human puts on it, or alternately it can grow with the amount of space granted to it. In essence this work taught us to shed our limiting beliefs, and attempt to understand the subtle, yet explicit language of our furry friends. When we stood back and saw the patterns we were generating within the systems around the beliefs we held of animals, the results were quite staggering. Patterns emerged that showed the repeated mistakes we made because of our fixed beliefs around animals (and life). When we freed ourselves from these beliefs, from the 'us versus them' duality, we saw the complementarity and the relationship as though it was any other relationship, and ultimately freed ourselves. Freeing oneself from such perceptions is a continual process and is never truly complete,

one has to always renegotiate perceptions. Finally we began to understand the nature of true communication and behaviour, it was no longer just 'animal behaviour' or 'instinct' that we were seeing. It was language, within which was embedded emotion and meaning.

Working with Dianne's belief that all of us on this planet are on equal footing with the same spiritual [evolving] capacity for experience, changed our views of what was happening. That no one was above any other, or deserved exalted treatment, be it due to cognitive ability or other factors, freed us to see the context in harmony. The relationships appeared so much more lucid and solid, this freedom in context opened our vision, we perceived a whole new reality.

These thoughts are well expressed in the final interview we had, where we looked at the road we had travelled as well as the shared meanings and co-constructions which had evolved from the time we spent together. We wanted to look at how we both experienced the journey and what the most pertinent issues were and the crux of what we felt emerged from the time spent together. I will now put forward this final interview, which condenses and brings to light clearly the issues at hand.

The Shared Journey

The final session that took place between the investigator and participants aimed at recapping what had transpired between us during the preceding weeks. We wanted to dialogue around the co-constructions that had emerged within the research system. How our meanings had changed and how these formed new ideas and themes during the time spent together. Many of the relationship aspects that emerged in this session as co-constructions have been touched upon in the previous sections as they initially stemmed from the earlier conversations. The conversation began by a mutual exchange of the ideas that were evident at the beginning of the study, and whether our expectations of this had been fulfilled or how they had changed. There was an intuitive knowing between

investigator and participants that much had changed and turned out rather differently from our initial expectations. However, a difficulty to verbalize the elusive nature of what had transpired seemed to fill the space between us.

Eventually after a period of discussion this elusiveness shifted to a position where we could give voice to our co-evolved ideas about the ‘human-animal’ relationship. These were changed as mentioned before from the human member giving more in the sense of knowledge, teaching, nurturance, care and provision to a shared relationship. Initially the shared ideas included the belief that the owner of an animal out of caring for, and sharing a ‘little companion’ experienced satisfaction. Together however, our views changed to reveal this picture in a whole new light. Part of the aim of this final meeting was to do a ‘check’ in a sense with each other as to the extent of our shared meanings and how working together affected our beliefs and experiences.

One of the most important things we discovered in our co-evolving dialogue was the agreement that the relationship with this horse was not at all one-sided as initially believed. Even though this aspect has been discussed in the text, the writer feels it a pertinent and central issue to this study, and emphasis is therefore placed on this. Welcome Guest in many ways gives more to Dianne than any of us had ever believed possible. It is very much a learning experience for Dianne to participate in this relationship with Welcome Guest. Even so, this learning does not manifest in a material manner, as any person can buy food for an animal with relative ease and painlessly provide physical care for an animal. The learning and teaching is on a different level, a level of mind and spirituality. One of the reasons why we felt he taught more was because he challenged all ideas conserved about him, relationships, belief systems, other living creatures and ourselves. An extract from this final conversation perhaps enlightens:

D: “ Yes, he teaches me, on a 60/40 basis.”

A: “He teaches you more?”

D: “I am telling you...”

A: "about yourself or who or what?"

D: "About everything!...About life in general, about relationships, about trust.

Everything that is important, everything in me, I really believe that. I really do, you know that."

A: "Ja."

D: "Whereas in the beginning I thought I would be the one who would teach him."

The very first premise we had held, as seen from the extract, Welcome Guest proved false. We thought we would provide and teach him and other animals certain things, and that he/they would grow from our input, and we would grow emotionally from the care given. This was challenged as already mentioned when we began to experience that he was possibly using something akin to what seemed in our minds to be a sophisticated communication system.

Further ideas that were challenged were those of an animal being purely a comforter, nurturer or conflict distracter, which is often why people think that animals are loved. The conversations and observations/interactions showed he has potential to be much more. In fact he illustrated that all emotional ties and needs are indeed shared. This was manifest in the fact that Welcome Guest formed part of an affectionate, nurturant relationship, but also one where the most conflict, frustration and disagreements might arise, he appeared to be a full partner to Dianne in every sense of the word. I will return to this idea later.

D: "...because he's my partner, he is my companion, he's my comforter, he's my therapy yes, he's my friend! Aren't these therapy anyway? He's also sometimes the one that I fight the most with." [He is her partner].

A: "he challenges you."

D: "Yes! It's a total relationship in every sense of the word."

A: "It's not as if, ja, just like you giving..."

D: "No, it's a total relationship, there's frustration, there's fights, there's um..."

A: "affection."

D: "but the love and the positive emotion overrides that, do you know what I'm...um"

A: "so it's a constructive relationship."

D: "Yes, I didn't understand that, I thought, its you who helped me to see that, you understand."

By recognizing him as a full partner in the relationship, scope and freedom for new ways of being were opened up for all, instead of previously stifling beliefs:

A: "You will fulfil that."

D: "You will, you'll make a shell out of him."

A: "that belief."

D: "because if, don't you, don't you grow within a fulfilling relationship if you have the freedom to be yourself."

A: "by recognizing there is scope for growth it will happen."

D: "Yes."

A: "You're giving it space."

D: "You love it, and you say you're important and you're giving that evolutionary tool to him."

A: "um."

D: "By saying that you're nothing just a dumb animal, he's saying fine let me be."

The relationship seen as a complete relationship encompassed the emphasis on communication as a prevalent occurrence, this too was identified throughout the study and especially in the final interview as a significant understanding of the relationship. The scope and possibility of an organized form of communication from Welcome Guest and the fact that we had been closed to this possibility before, highlighted our own limitations and inadequacies clearly. An illustration of this being where we would often be baffled and confused by certain things which Welcome Guest did, by certain of his reactions. Why was he (for apparently no reason) pulling his ears back and being mean to Dianne when minutes before they were affectionate to one another? Was he just a moody horse? These issues were really wondered about and pondered on at great length.

Through our conversations we began picking up threads which connected the shared ideas that he was not just moody, or unpredictable. If looked at deeply enough a situation would always produce a pattern, and we thought we had found a pattern that fitted for us. This horse was not loving one second, biting the next and loving the next again. This made no sense. We wondered was he just strange, were we inadequate and making continual mistakes, did he hate Dianne? That emerging pattern told us he was communicating his views and desires. This was maybe a little hard to swallow at first but this was confirmed in our own minds with time. The subtle reactions to our behaviour, which could not be conditioning, reminded us that a different reality may be at play to what we new. We recognized and reminded ourselves that just because speech was not present, this did not mean language was not. We had to learn to understand what his language was, and then with time, together develop this language further if so chosen. To learn that language was not dependent on words or on physical form, and building the relationship in learning to read language and communication emerged strongly.

- A: "Mmm, ja, and the fact that he's in the physical body of an animal doesn't change anything."
- D: "No, no, because the relationship, the components that make up the relationship are not dependent on what the physical thing looks like."
- A: "So the fact that he can't actually speak words, doesn't mean he can't speak."
- D: "No, cause he speaks with his ears, his tail, with his legs."
- A: "or his attitude."
- D: "His attitude, his teeth, all of those things. You have to learn to hear what he is actually saying even though its not, its like if you have a deaf and dumb child, are you going to take that child and give it an injection because it can't verbalize."
- A: "Say that it can't speak."
- D: "or a deaf child, yes. You teach it sign language. You develop a language that the two of you..."
- A: "So the language is not inherently..."
- D: "no"
- A: "dependent on words."

D: "No (!), language is..."

A: "language!"

D: "Ja, language is something, that you and the other party develop between the two of you, you know. Or do you disagree with me?"

Acknowledging the ability of the animal to have a form of language freed Dianne to change her beliefs about him and herself, as well as their relationship:

A: "and in fact when you're not yourself that's when he gets most aggravated."

D: "Ja, he hates me, he can kill me when I'm not myself, its true."

A: "So, he actually seems to cut under all those layers that other people build up."

D: "... So it's a more fulfilling relationship than most human ones."

A: "More honest, much more."

D: "It is, I think so."

A: "Yes."

D: "and I didn't realize that at the beginning of this, I must be honest."

A: "but can you really say you didn't?"

D: "No I don't think so Angeline I didn't see the full..."

A: "picture."

D: "Ja, I didn't understand. Its only recently I think when we started cantering and that, when, when I lost my fear of him and then I really started to see what the truth of this relationship was you see."

A: "Mm, and how much."

D: "and how much my own, when I put certain beliefs onto him."

A: "your own limitations."

D: "Yes, the problems it caused, okay."

A: "ja, and he was trying to show you no."

D: "Yes and that's why today he's totally trustworthy. I trust this animal with my life."

A: "what was the biggest thing that made that fear go do you think?"

D: "The realization that he loved me back, you see, the realization that he had an ability."

A: "and that when he was being otherwise it wasn't hatred, it was communication."

D: "Mm."

A: "It wasn't rejection."

When looking at the total relationship and acknowledging the bond between Welcome Guest and Dianne, it was only in the process of the discussions that the realization dawned of the fullness and completeness of this relationship. Of importance here is the holistic view that emerged of the relationship, which made us realize that these components and dynamics of the relationship were not dependent on the form of the physical body or the physical casing of the being. The animal is another living entity in his own right and not in the relationship to absorb all the excess affection, moodiness and projections of the human counterpart in the relationship. We believe that we do not have the right to place all of our own expectations and feelings on them. The animal has a sense of its own self and can choose to accept or reject the affection depending on its position at the time. Welcome Guest is not a soft toy or any other entertainment. This shift in ideas is highlighted here:

D: "Yes that's exactly it, he would need me and I would, that would be the reason why I would have him, because here was an animal that had a need. But that's not how it turned out."

A: "So its not, that's not how I see it, how do you see it?"

D: "I now see it as a mutual giving, a mutual learning, a mutual, like a relationship."

A: "Ja, before it was always like a mother-child idea, like you had to provide."

D: "Yes, and it was wrong, we both provide, and we both take, and we both give, like any normal relationship."

A: "So he's not sort of, just a soft toy that's alive."

D: "No ways, Uh-uh."

A: "You know what I mean, an entertainment."

D: "something to play with."

A: "ja."

D: "to make you feel that."

A: "to feel better."

D: "No, it's not that at all. It's the same thing as my other relationships, a marriage, or a relationship with a child, or a relationship, or a friendship, I think a child is not a good one, it's a more equal one, a more...like a marriage."

A: "a partnership."

D: "Or a very close friendship, um you know."

A: "Yes."

D: "You know its got all the same attributes, the fact that he's an animal..."

A: "So, we've actually together come to the idea that from the person sort of getting benefits, a one sided benefit from the animal that was needy..."

D: "Mm, needy."

A: "Ja, needy, dependent. Totally dependent, to a more sort of holistic understanding, that it's a relationship like any other relationship."

D: "Exactly, yes. It has its frustrations sometimes as well, ja."

All things within the relationship appeared to be mutual, all expectations, giving, learning and emotions. The mutuality of it really impacted on the research system. We never expected such strong mutuality, it was not at all anticipated. But then normal relationship issues emerged as with any other relationship. The mutuality included a strong sense of sharing knowledge and friendship, with neither party being one-up or one-down on the other. The 'needy ideas' we held were lopsided - an egocentric view, a holistic view enabled us to change this view and appreciate the recursiveness and complementarity evident within this system. Our limitations caused doubt concerning Welcome Guest's ability to love and to be 'in relationship'. This caused uncertainty and fear, and blinded us to the reading of his communication. This is summarized in the following:

D: "It gives you a solid base, it's a foundation to being yourself from."

A: "Yes,"

D: "So I was wrong in the beginning to think that..."

A: "maybe, ja"

D: "that it was any different from any human-based relationship."

A: "but that's what we all do think."

D: "Ja, and I think that that's what the point of this dissertation has to be."

A: "Yes,"

D: "that its no different from any other human-based relationship because although they don't have the power of speech, they have everything else."

A: "They have language."

Working together as 'co-authors' arose from our discussion. We explored the issues of working together and having traveled the path together:

A: "that was one of my questions, I wanted to know if..."

D: "No..."

A: "us working together has made a difference."

D: "Yes, it has, yes, because we explore deeper within, and we look at the whole, the relationship as a whole. We look at him and we look at me. We try to understand, and that understanding brought us to where we are now. Its an understanding we have come to through our discussions. Because at the beginning I always knew that there was a special bond here, yes. That bond was there years ago before he was even mine. But, but it was always actually more than that and I didn't actually realize it was a, a relationship."

In having a final say on this issue, none of us could truly find closure. The feeling amongst all was one of continuation where many avenues and discoveries would still be made and that new depth in this 'relationship issue' would ever be unfolding:

A: "Before I go, what would be your last thought on this, I mean we could speak about it again but we've got to start drawing the whole thing together now."

D: "Like what do you mean my last thoughts."

A: "Um, okay so we agree that we've come a long way, and that our meanings have changed."

D: "Ja but I think that my last thoughts would be that we still haven't even gone half way."

A: "okay."

D: "as far as I think we could go."

A: "Mm."

D: "You know."

A: "that there is still endless territory to cover."

Perhaps just in voicing that there is still endless territory to cover, enough has been said and this remains the challenge of the future.

I must admit that the experience of having endless territory to cover truly astounded me in relation to this 'relationship' and the dynamics surrounding it. One such area which was not explored further within this study was that of directly communicating with Dianne's brother and mother. There were several reasons for this. Possibly the most significant reason being that Dianne did not want to involve her family in the study. Dianne and Welcome Guest did not hold back in sharing anything with me, and I respected her wish in connection with her family. Dianne felt strongly that the focus of the study was on her and Welcome Guest's relationship, and that the family would not grasp the significance of this or that they may even miss the point completely. Perhaps if they had been interviewed, Dianne's 'sacred space' may have been violated, or the meanings within the family may have been perturbed and changed radically. In any event, this was something which she did not want them involved in. This family may not have appreciated the 'intrusion' into their system, especially on such an intimate level of 'family belongingness', and I believe Dianne was expressing this too. A certain degree of loyalty, friendship and trust had developed between Dianne and myself during the research endeavour, and I believe that by bringing the family into the conversations, this would have been threatened.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the experience of the exploration of the 'human-animal relational system' has been presented. The findings and experiences related here may perhaps seem inconsequential. However, from the viewpoint of social constructionism and ecosystemic epistemology this underscores the richness of shared and co-evolved meanings and realities. It was the writer's aim to merely open the gateways of questioning and experience concerning the human-animal relationship.

Perhaps the words of Carey (1988, p.29) would ring true to any reader who found a resonance with the experiences that have been explored.

“The true human can tune to the voice of the river and give it expression. The true human can tune to the voice of the wind and speak the words that the wind cannot speak without human tongue. The true human can blend with the essences of the forest, the spirits of every creeping, crawling, living thing and can represent them fairly and evoke from them the best that they can be. Each form of created life is energy manifesting in matter, ever-changing, ever-flowing into something always capable of more expression, more unfoldment, more...potential. The true human is designed to aid the development of all life forms, drawing out their ever-expanding capacities to provide always fuller revelations of that which lies in the heart of God. The true human gives voice to the essences of all created things....”

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. To act as if you know it all is catastrophic, and if you try to control it you will stare into your empty hand.
(Tao Te Ching).

Introduction

Since first putting forth the aims of this study, the researcher has in essence come full circle, where the original curiosity and questions concerning the human-animal bond and the implications thereof need to be considered again. It is the hope of the researcher that the shared exploration provided the reader with a road on which travelling proved to be a meaningful experience. In finding closure to this journey, the researcher seeks to weave a concluding pattern of connection which captures the essence of the journey completed. The aim of the research and the relevance of the findings will be considered, including the future potential for this kind of work. Finally, other authors' ideas in connection with the human-animal relationship are included as points of consideration.

The Aim and Findings of the 'Mutual Exploration'

The aim of this dissertation was to explore the relationship between a human-being and an animal in their natural context, looking at the systems surrounding this relationship. The significant systems around this relationship would include the family system and the family's belief system. The 'fit' between these systems and how this continually changed and evolved was considered to be important. The richness of meaning within the relationships and the continuing flow and change of meaning in the family relationships over time was also considered to be of significance. These focal points of reference were

approached from the perspective of an ecosystemic epistemology. Looking more closely at the findings discussed in Chapter 5, it is possible to gauge the fulfillment of these aims.

The Co-evolution of Meaning

Within this research system meaning was continually co-evolved through language, as put forward by the social constructionist approach discussed in Chapter 3. The findings of this study consequently focus on the beliefs and meanings within this human-animal relationship as they unfolded from before the exploratory study took place until afterwards. It was not the aim of the researcher to change any of participant's belief or to control any aspect of the relationship. Through the shared discussions and the inherent nature of co-constructing understanding and meaning, the belief systems and meanings within the system did indeed change.

As evidenced in the progression of themes presented in Chapter 5, an in-depth investigation was made into the experiential world of the human-animal relationship. The participants involved within the 'investigating system' experienced these changing beliefs on a daily basis, some of which manifested as shifts within the relationship on a deep level. These changing meanings were completely mutually evolved, and it was only through the process of double description, or rather 'multiple description' between the research members that the depth, meaning and understanding of the human-animal relationship began to unfold and expand.

Besides the description of the experiences related, it was agreed upon that certain central issues were evident from the research endeavour. These issues centered strongly on the role that Dianne and Welcome Guest's relationship fulfilled within the family system. Further emphasis was placed on the importance that the family held regarding the relationship, and the importance of this to Dianne and Welcome Guest. The aspect which seemed to be most significant here, was that even though the family do not usually overtly acknowledge the significance of Dianne's relationship with Welcome Guest, they do in many covert ways acknowledge the relationship. In a sense the family manage to

maintain their 'status quo' by not allowing this 'animal' family member full entry into their system. One way in which this is achieved, is by not clearly verbalizing that he is a fully-fledged family member. The family rather choose not to see how Welcome Guest on a daily level impacts upon their lives. However, he is acknowledged as a 'periphery-family member', or 'pseudo-family member' by the family, (Dianne of course acknowledges him completely). The family partly acknowledging him by saying that he is Dianne's 'soulmate', and they also do not dare to challenge Dianne's devotion to Welcome Guest. The family does allow Dianne to have 'time' for this relationship, but they never actually incorporate Welcome Guest into their midst as a fully-fledged member who impacts on all of them. In a sense, this could be seen as partially being maintained by Dianne who chooses in some ways to keep her family at a distance from this intimate relationship. The 'space' which Dianne finds with Welcome Guest is her only 'space' where she can be truly alone, private and 'in relationship' with an intimate other. This makes the time they share together even more precious and 'sacred', especially as Dianne lacks a haven of safety and nurturance at home. Allowing the family in, and too near this relationship will not only bring the family issues into Dianne's haven, it will intrude upon the magic of the time they spend together, shattering their fragile moments shared. Perhaps if the family completely accepted this member into their midst, and incorporated this relationship into their identity of 'family', they would threaten the sanctity of Dianne's privacy and sanctuary. This idea interestingly enough seems to be reflected in Welcome Guest's moods. Welcome Guest seems to resent sharing his time with Dianne with other people. He is invariable difficult and 'stropy' when 'unwelcome guests' attach themselves to Dianne. This was framed that Welcome Guest represents Dianne's 'mirror' in which she sees her own struggles emerging, i.e he becomes difficult when their time is encroached upon, when usually she is upset about this. If Dianne no longer has this private refuge, the inner dynamics of this family could be threatened, and in threatening the family dynamics, many changes may result in the family. This could imply that other family members would possibly have to face taking on different, more supportive and challenging roles within the system. This could undoubtedly be uncomfortable for them. The repercussions of this are likely to be

extensive, and may include the insecurity of new emotions, the facing of painful personal issues, and the disruption of the family's current pattern of functioning.

The impact of such changes in the relationships within this system could be equated to the change that a marriage or a divorce may provoke within a family system. Maintaining the premise mentioned in Chapter 5 that Welcome Guest is Dianne's life partner, or that he even partially fulfills the role of a husband in her life, then perhaps the many intricate dynamics that are at play within this system can be understood. Dianne's mother and brother are very dependent on her for 'survival', yet they manage to organize her life around theirs, often causing much heartache for her. If the system were to undergo an overhaul, they could be faced with serious questions as to the roles that they fulfill in the family. Consequently they would have to consider how they would impact Dianne and her horse if they had to overtly accept her relationship with Welcome Guest. It does not appear to be within this family's accepted tradition to question their own behaviour and the effect that this may have on other people. It is therefore functional and convenient that the consequences of their behaviour are 'absorbed' by the relationship between Welcome Guest and Dianne, and not placed before them to examine.

Interestingly, the relationship with Percy seems to be less threatening to this family, and more readily accepted by the family than the relationship with the Welcome Guest. This could be due to a basic practicality, such that the parrot lives in the flat with them and they are all exposed to her on a daily basis. Obviously a strong bond and attachment would be formed towards a bird who lived in such close proximity to them on a daily level. Another reason for this could be because this relationship is a less 'sacred', and more 'acceptable' relationship than the one with Welcome Guest. The family members all seem able to relate to Percy as some sort of family child, grandchild or peer within the system. In showing affection for Percy and creating a unique space for her, she becomes part of what is spoken about in the family, part of the 'daily routine' and is ultimately considered part of the family. This is not the case with Welcome Guest, where a silent acceptance concerning him prevails, implying that delving deeper into the relationship may say more about the family than they care to hear. Welcome Guest's role in

maintaining the 'status quo' of the family is therefore much greater than Percy's role in this regard.

The importance of this relationship is further evidenced and given voice by the significance of spiritual beliefs which are embroidered around the relationship. Welcome Guest has become a part of Dianne's spiritual belief system and the relationship is also punctuated around this. This can be seen as significant as Dianne does not share her family's belief of Judaism. This perhaps serves the purpose of creating more distance in what could be seen as an enmeshed family system. As one would share a belief system with a life-partner and find meaning for daily events within this, so Welcome Guest fulfills a similar function for Dianne. This highlights the fact as previously mentioned, that the relationship is defined as a significant relationship, based on the same premises as other human relationships, despite the fact that Welcome Guest as a living being is in a different kind body. Within Dianne's system and frame of reference he fulfills exactly the same and probably more of a function than a human relationship would at this point in her life. It is only the limitation of her own and other people's perception that renders this relationship different from any human relationship.

For Dianne, the change in her perception signaled an important shift in her life. This can be explained by the fact that as human beings we tend to limit our view of life and animals by the lenses which we wear that define one specific reality. Within this 'reality' we do not allow for other richer, more meaningful realities to play a part in our lives. Dianne, although acknowledging Welcome Guest from the beginning, did not initially acknowledge the significance of this relationship in her life, and how the experience of the relationship changed, when her ideas and experiences about what animals are and can be also changed. When her 'perceptual limitations' about the relationship were initially challenged (especially by Welcome Guest), she became confused, and in the search for new meaning, a whole new world opened up to her concerning the potential of the relationship. Previously overlooked subtleties in their interactions and communication became evident to her [us], and we had to re-evaluate many of our beliefs around this. Having views challenged in such a manner led us to acknowledge that in a different

worldview we are humble students before our animal counterparts, and that perhaps at times they understand the subtleties of communication and relationship better than we do. It is undisputed in the minds of the research members that the meaning of the human-animal relationship in this exploration was not purely for, or attached to obtaining the satisfaction of companionship, touch, nurturance or other such comfort needs.

In conclusion, we as participant researchers had to acknowledge that the essence of the rich experiential meaning within this human-animal relationship lay within the fold of Dianne and Welcome Guest 'being in a true relationship' with one another and finding a 'sacred space' for each other. Within this 'space' Dianne found that the secret and success of such a relationship was found in challenging the limited ways of thinking about the relationship. A further relevant theme that emerged strongly from the research is that the properties of a true relationship are universal regardless of the physical form of the entities involved. This theme could possibly be further explored in subsequent studies. That the many subsystems involved in and around a relationship, be it in a purely human form or human-animal form, impact upon it, is also evident from the results. The niche which the family carves for this relationship sculpts the very nature of the relationship. Similarly, this relationship further shapes the family system and provides new role definitions, reinforcing or creating new meaning within the family system, which is congruent to that system.

To say that Dianne and Welcome Guest did not fit perfectly into the larger family ecology would be to once again split the whole ecosystem into separate parts, and the connecting patterns and unique richness would be lost. Of course for each human-animal-system interaction, the meanings would be unique, but the interconnecting patterns and relational premises would surely be universal.

Perhaps it would be appropriate at this point to again highlight the title of this dissertation. The title speaks of the 'unacknowledged family member', this member of course being the animal, and the role of this animal in the larger family system. It may appear at first that this case study does not fit the title, in the sense that this animal

member is in a sense acknowledged. In the writer's opinion, this is however a very relevant case study, as it merely attempts to make explicit the processes that are so often 'unacknowledged' but experienced on deep levels in families. Furthermore, Welcome Guest did not begin by being recognized as a fully-fledged family member, his presence was initially resented by Dianne's family members. It was only with time and patience that the family began to 'honour' him in relation to Dianne and accept his place. Almost as a family would do with a son or daughter-in-law. Even now, Dianne's family does not completely accept the significance of this creature in her life and he remains in a sense 'unacknowledged' by them, and only fully acknowledged by herself and a few others within the confines of the stable context (including this writer).

This 'unacknowledged status' of the animal in our society is not surprising. Traditional studies of kinship and family do not acknowledge these non-humans as significant for family structure, and community workers often do not track their importance for relationships between households (Perin, 1981). This is further illustrated by the fact that the death of a pet is usually not treated in a sensitive manner. Grieving for one's pet is more often than not seen as odd and overly sentimental in our society. Whereas rituals governing family behaviour provide support when people die, formalized grief rituals are not generally initiated when a canine, feline or other type of animal family member dies. This accentuates once again the reality around most animal-human relationships, and is an issue that should be further looked into.

Concerns and Recommendations

As seen from Chapter 2, much has been written concerning the usefulness of animals in therapeutic settings. However when it comes to understanding the significance of the relationship between humans and animals in a natural context, our knowledge seems to be somewhat impoverished. Much of the literature appears to be anecdotal: such as comments by authors like Gladys Taber (in Cusack & Smith, 1984, p.15) who writes,

“When everything goes wrong with human relationships, which happens at times, there is comfort and restorative power in the soft muzzle laid gently on your lap, an ecstatic tail wagging, or a small head rubbing against your neck while a purr-song says, ‘how wonderful you are’”.

While this is necessary and uplifting, understanding does not abound. Katcher (1981) speaks of this, saying that despite the billions spent yearly on the care of animals, there have been almost no studies applying current anthropological, ethnological, or sociological methods to the study of the phenomenon of the human-animal bond. The work that has generated the most public excitement has been the pioneering work in which a companion animal was used to alter the life of an emotionally disturbed adult or child. The groups that teach horse riding to the mentally compromised or physically handicapped have made similar brave and tender efforts. These interventions may demonstrate the attractiveness of the animals, but they do not tell us much about the dynamics of the bonds that tie the very large mass of people who own animals to their animals.

Katcher (1981, p.41) says that there seems to be good reason why pets have been pushed into a small corner of our scientific consciousness.

He says, “our tradition of ‘scientific psychology’ is no less anthropocentric than our moral tradition, but in fact is even more limited than our moral heritage in that it has excluded both the natural and the supernatural from its vision. Anthropology has provided excellent studies of the symbolic importance of animals in unindustrialized societies. Yet there are almost no studies of the cultural roles of animals in urban societies. Our life with animals fits much more into the category of the sentimental rather than the primitive or the violent, and we have no psychology of the happy and the mundane. We are all taught to despise the sentimental, to think of it as banal or as a cover for darker hidden emotions. Affection for puppies is of interest only when the person demonstrating the affection is a concentration camp guard or an ax murderer.”

Katcher (1981) seems to echo the sentiments of others who say that the limitation from the sciences seem to be based on the idea that animals are somehow mundane, sentimental indulgences in our daily lives. The relevance of these relationships is usually dismissed.

Within the studies that are considered 'scientifically acceptable', the larger ecology of the phenomena is not considered nor preserved and so distorted fragments are used as explanations for the various findings. From an ecosystemic perspective, this greater ecology cannot be disturbed. While this investigation may have limited generalizability, it is the writer's belief that by preserving the ecology in all relationships, the patterns emerging on a level of deeper connection may be useful in situations where relationships are not of the conventional kind. This may be limited to challenging stuck ways of viewing the world or it may be to open new horizons and challenges concerning ourselves.

Further Recommendations

From the significance of the meanings and relationship seen from the human-animal bond in this study, it would be advisable that psychologists and therapists perhaps pay greater attention and focus more on the animal members within family systems. It would appear that these 'unacknowledged members' may in fact be much more integral members of the system with more influence than imagined. Although Welcome Guest began as an unacknowledged member in his system, he is now acknowledged to a certain degree, due to Dianne's persistence. His role and value within this family is clear from the story. Many insights into family situations and dynamics may be ascertained from these relationships as evidenced by Welcome Guest and Dianne's story, this would be especially true if families and others also recognize this potential.

Included in this recognition would also then be the importance of letting family members grieve the animal-member in the event of such an animal's death, and marking

such a passing with an appropriate ritual. This is one ceremony which is overlooked in our culture and treated with disdain when it is a potential source of intense pain and distress. So too could therapists consider not only acknowledging this relationship, but actually include it in different forms of therapy. Animal family members could physically be included in sessions and become part of therapist's interventions and deeper conceptualizations and planning for the future of the family.

It would be of great value if further studies around families and their animal members could be done to further explore the meanings and patterns within the systems, and to complexify the already existing knowledge. This may lead to new insights which could be relevant in therapeutic settings. Perhaps some of these studies could include professionals across the disciplines such as psychologists and veterinarians and possibly others who may be able to assist in this area. A greater understanding of symptoms, problems and chronic illness may be gained by considering the wider relationship systems around their clients. In this manner we could move toward more holistic health and healing across the board for all disciplines where information from different systems converge and elucidate one another. It is the researcher's belief that we are at the threshold of a time where such holistic and joint ventures would be possible. Such ventures may generate greater understanding for the phenomena in our daily lives and consulting rooms. Veterinarians and psychologists need to perhaps spend more time together on such projects learning vital skills from one another in perception and recognition of certain patterns and chronic illnesses. It may be that the one could serve as a catalyst in solving the other's long standing difficulty.

Conclusion

"Keeping a companion animal can help one mature through understanding, to appreciate the intrinsic worth and basic rights of a fellow earth being. As we learn to relate better with animals, so will we relate more effectively with our own kind since selfish demands and unrealistic expectations are a barrier to any meaningful

relationship, be it with a human or with a non-human" (Fox, 1981, p.38).

It is the recommendation of the writer that much can be learned from the premises inherent in the human-animal relationship, and that these be explored further in search for fuller explanations of our own nature.

In interacting with Dianne and Welcome Guest, I learned more about myself and my beliefs and how these beliefs have the potential to limit or free me, than about anything else. Because I was ultimately my own point of reference this could not be avoided, and much of the exploration which I undertook was 'self-exploration'. Dianne and Welcome Guest allowed me into their inner, private space where I experienced a meaningful connection with two other living beings who held nothing back in sharing their love, pains and frustrations with me. They dedicated time and invested everything in helping me to make this project work. In their selflessness and caring I understood the sacredness of their relationship and private space... I am truly richer for the opportunity. It has been a long time in coming, the understanding of the relationship between souls clothed in different garments, and we are but at the threshold of the journey....

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