

# **Creative Living as Health, Health as Creative Living, and Case Study of Seemingly Insurmountable Challenge**

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A case study of profound challenge illustrates a bifurcation point in life between the positive and negative path, in which the subject has taken a creative approach to strategize and actualize his life course. The case is described by means of an invited lecture, followed by dialog between authors, both of which are discussed in reference to personal and therapeutic relevance, and methodological aspects of case study research.

**Keywords:** *creativity; health; case study research; challenge; posttraumatic growth; self actualization*

At various times in our lives we are faced with challenges that tax our abilities to limits. Then there is the event like no other. A challenge befalls us that seems almost insurmountable. It may be living on after loss of the love of one's life, surviving cancer, and recovering from a near fatal automobile accident. Regardless of the cause, the consequences are devastating, and the path forward is arduous and difficult. The case reported is remarkable, in that the personal response to the onset of Multiple Sclerosis (MS) was transformative, and the subsequent attitude and actions may serve to provide an illustrative and inspiring case study of those who choose this path in contrast to one that spirals downward to premature death. Given the response and approach taken

by the second author to his diagnosis, the first author invited the second author to collaborate, making this article accurately and deservedly a co-authored process.

We decided to organize this article into the following major sections because the sequence reflects our process of collaboration: purpose, origins, lecture, interview, discussion, and conclusion. We treated the lecture as a text upon which we interpreted and expounded in the interview. Subsequently, the discussion was generated. It provided the opportunity to show the various emphases that can be brought to case study research (Edwards, 1998; McLeod, 2011; Yin, 2009) that is a versatile and dynamic approach to human inquiry.

## **Purpose**

This article reports and discusses the experience of the second author on becoming disabled almost three decades ago. He was diagnosed having MS months after two events of profound loss of loved ones. Contrary to what one might predict, these events of loss, and the grief and sorrow to follow, at some point transformed to become an enduring source of energy and motivation, by which he has devoted his life to his research activities. Given the response, attitude, and actions over the decades to follow, we concluded the primary purpose of this paper is to present information that may be of some benefit to those in extremely challenging predicaments, their family and friends, about ways one person faced and continues to engage a seemingly insurmountable challenge.

A secondary purpose is to relate the case as illustrative of several methodological qualities that can be applied in case study research, a family of widely used forms of research that study and report on various phenomena, situations, and predicaments of human lives. The forms have

in common focus on a case with great potential for foci on a set of like cases, a comparison between cases, within and/or cross case analyses, and particular genre brought into play by the propensities of the researcher (e.g. autobiographical, biographical, clinical, evaluative, hermeneutic, narrative, phenomenological, systemic, others). Expounding such perspectives may be of interest and aid to researchers who find one or more specific qualities of case study research having greatest relevance to the study and description of their cases. The explication may also be informative for those who do not do case study research, but read case reports seeking to understand their conceptualization and construction.

## **Origins**

### **Our Collaboration**

The two authors met more than twenty years ago. Our common interests and friendship have developed into a productive collaboration ever since. This article represents one such convergence we believe may be of interest, fulfilling to the purposes stated above. The predicament of the second author and the research background and orientation of the first author provided a special circumstance leading us to conclude this collaboration merited our attention. Related reasons become apparent in the interview, at which time we came to the realization this article should be written.

### **The Bobbie Collen Lecture**

When the first author's mother passed away in 1996 of Parkinson's disease, a lecture series was established in her memory at Temple Isaiah synagogue in Lafayette, California. His parents were founding members. The lecture series was named "The Bobbie Collen Lecture in Creative and

Healthy Living,” because she embodied this idea over the course of her life. The intention was to bring this life theme to greater visibility in the community twice each year by hosting an invited speaker, who is the living embodiment of the theme, to talk about any aspect of his or her choosing.

On April 6, 2008, the second author was the speaker. His chosen title was “Creative living as health, and health as creative living.” The lecture consisted of three parts and a conclusion. It covered highlights (epiphanies) of the second author’s life, findings in themselves, because from his point of view, they in part are responsible for generating his strategy for living a creative and healthy life. Delivered in a series of slides, the lecture contains key anchor points, a potential organizing framework for presenting, interpreting, and eventually understanding the case. The gist of the lecture is presented below. It can be found in its entirety (Minati, 2008) in the web site of Congregation Beth Shalom, the second author’s synagogue in Milan.

## **The Bobbie Collen Lecture by Gianfranco Minati**

### **Part 1: My life making “creative living health and health creative living”**

What I am trying to convey to you is a message of life and joy that can be effective (Slide 1). A smile is more productive for the person offering it than for the ones receiving it (from my father). We all should do the good not for getting a compensation from somebody, but as compensation itself for ourselves (I give credit to Rabbi Robert Rothman). Actually, doing the ‘good’ is a way to *abstract* while what is ‘wrong’ is usually due to a behavior looking for immediate advantages being insensitive to other persons now and in the future. I am not here to suggest a general approach, but to humbly tell you my experience.

*My awe for God is my health.*

*In the continuous search and anguish to honor God, my creativity is continuously striving to use as well as I can the resources I have, and turning all I have got into a resource.*

RESPONSIBILITY IS MY HEALTH, AND TO BE RESPONSIBLE IS MY CREATIVITY.

*Understanding is **my** way to be closer to God and to deserve my days.*

Several other ways, i.e. other *missions* in life, are of course, possible.

*Kohèlet – Ecclesiastes (5,11)*

*Sweet is the slip of a labouring man, whether he eat little or much;*

*but the satiety of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.*

*(for affective reasons I use a book of The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic text published on 1917 by the Jewish Publication Society of America)*

Slide 1. Making creative living health and health creative living.

I was born in 1951. I did not receive a formal religious education, but a very intense informal one. The family of my mother was in the midst of the Holocaust, but my mother avoided telling me about this experience during her life. By the way, she was much traumatized and kept everything inside herself for very long time.

I had my first direct experience with death in 1980 when my wife and I were waiting for the birth of our first son. He died at birth, because of complications during labor. I lived through this experience with great intensity, both alone and sharing with my wife. I realized that I had to try to convert it into a prayer, not to ask for something, but by looking into myself (I give credit to Rabbi Robert Rothman). But I did not know what to do for prayer. I was alone when they buried my son. I brought the pictures we took of my wife pregnant to be buried with him. I felt I had *to bury time*, surely not to forget but to give it meaning was my duty. To quote *Kohèlet* –

*Ecclesiastes* (3:1), “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”

Only several years later did I realize it was my first meeting with my *a-temporal life*. In this view events are not ordered by physical time, but by significance to me. For instance, the death of my son is now and continuously present. This increases my awareness and it is a challenge to convert temporal events into a-temporal ones and *generate* a-temporal events in my life like love, knowledge and beauty. This is freedom and responsibility for me.

A couple of years later we had another son. My wife and I had three or four very intense years dedicated to set the initial conditions of the life of the baby, making sure he would learn language and music, playing creative games, and giving unbounded parental love. Then my wife was diagnosed with cancer. She started and managed a very intense process of dying. I began to question our values, reflect on my life, and think about the challenges of the situation. It was an ending of *our* story, but not just an end. I was required to have a new beginning. I had to deal with the *shame* and challenge of being the survivor. It was very difficult for me. I had to face the challenge to *rethink my life*. It was a second, stronger call to life. At that time, I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS).

My mother and father dedicated the rest of their lives to help me take care of myself and my son while dealing with MS. They both shared a strong sense of *responsibility* in life. *Their implicit religious content was a continuous teaching for me*. We decided to call each other by our first names to avoid using the word *mom*, respecting the loss of my son.

My parents eventually died leaving me alone to continue our story. My life was open and it seemed to me a new starting point. But at that time I was unable to understand, unaware of what I was receiving.

To quote from Genesis (2:19), human beings are co-creators: “And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; brought them unto the man to see what he would call them; and whatsoever the man would call every living creature, that was to be the name thereof.”

As with children when we say *now repeat it with your own words* (and, if possible, tell it better), we all repeat life by using our new words, while *trying to tell it better*. Sometime during the telling of different stories they become *songs*.

In science we say that we must start by climbing up on the shoulders of giants. I had giants in my life. I had to set some strategies to deal with my MS. First of all I realized that, because we were supposed to spend our lives together, it would be better to be *friends* rather than *enemies*. I had to make MS my friend.

At the beginning I was ashamed of my inability to walk and my generalized weakness. Then I understood they were new words to be used to tell new statements, to tell my story in a new way. It was important not to tell my story by using my previous language, and now, I had to use a new language.

I realized that a good strategy to use was to convert constraints into opportunities (Slide 2).

1. walk by *using the context*, rather than being only *a passive part of the context*;
2. design a life on constraints by *using* them, instead of being at the mercy of them, such as sophisticated use of hands, listening, watching, activities requiring reading and writing, by *balancing and compensating, instead of avoiding*;

3. invent new ways to play;
4. never complain, but use sense of humor;
5. be available to help and not only receive help;
6. enjoy *suitable* challenges;
7. self-monitor;
8. be aware of the problems about my acceptance by others in the social context;
9. don't set unreasonable goals;
10. be aware of the present situation;
11. decide in advance that everything may be decided at the moment;
12. manage the way people help me, that to say, *help people to help me*;
13. make kindness my standard for healthy and creative living;
14. help people to understand my constraints.

Slide 2. A new strategy for healthy and creative living.

This new strategy for healthy and creative living, consisting of the 14 points above, required from me a lot of creativity, humility, and will.

## **Part 2: The God of Torah**

To follow my new strategy, I tried to *recognize* God everywhere (Slide 3). “God is everywhere when we allow Him to get in” (I give credit to Rabbi Robert Rothman). Everyone has his/her path. And we are blessed to be in a place where we can design life to include the ingredients to transform it into a good, healthy and creative life. It is, once again, the matter of co-creation by using what is available: sufferance, joy, poverty, money, intelligence, sweetness, generosity, kindness, strength, availability, honesty, sensitivity, compassion, love, for each of us to write a new story using our strategy for healthy and creative living.



. . . the Torah is not a rule book as much as it is a source of direction for life and living. If taken literally it loses its purpose and power. It is a guide that needs human implementation through creativity and discovery. Judaism teaches we are not to construe ourselves to be puppets under divine control but rather partners with God in the ongoing process of evolution, change and growth, Shutfay Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu. The more we learn and know the better and stronger is our religious attachment. To me, that is the essential part of what it means to be a Jew. It is not an accident that Judaism has always stressed education as a fulfillment of our being. Learning is vital if one is to be a complete Jew. . .

(from a speech by Rabbi Robert Rothman, June 2007, at Temple Beth Shalom, Milan, Italy).

Slide 3. The Torah as a source of direction for life and living.

To quote from Exodus (20:4): “Thou shall not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness, of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” I am enthusiastic for the command about images in Exodus 20 because it is not to be understood as a *restriction*, but rather as a way of thinking encouraging abstraction, i.e. liberating our mind and creating a healthy and creative life. I understand several rules as meta-rules (i.e. rules about rules) of meta-levels able to *induce* autonomous ways of thinking. The biblical injunction, “Lo Ta'aseh Lecha Call Temunah . . . (Do not make an image, a picture...)” reminds us of the obligation to say “No” to static and unhealthy ways to live. “Let us say ‘No’ to the worship of the past. The pictures are moving now. Let us move forward with them” (spoken by Rabbi Bernard H. Mehlman, September 13, 2007, during Rosh Hashannah-5768 event at Temple Beth Shalom, Milan, Italy).

As a first practical conclusion I understand that we always have to take an active and responsive role in life. What does it *practically* mean as regards to creative living as health and health as creative living?

Focusing on health in my situation means, for instance, that health asks for an active role of the person. A patient may go to the physician looking for maintenance, looking for being repaired and completely *depending* on medicines, surgery, and rehabilitation. This may be defined as a passive role.

An active role is based on the fact that a person needs to feel better, improve and recover not just to resume a biological state assumed as health, but because it is necessary for the role, mission, and purpose s/he has in life. I have the experience of how this active approach is *effective* to both resume biological health and support psychological, spiritual healing, as you want to call it.

I would like to mention now how I was able to couple this view to my scientific research. Thanks to that, it was possible, in my view, to consider an extension of this approach to issues related to my mind and thinking about my situation.

### **Part 3: The acquired mind**

**3.1 A short introduction to the concept of emergence.** The active approach introduced above may be coupled with the fact that entities not only do possess properties, but in turn, they are able to establish new entities and acquire new properties. Examples are teams established by single players, corporations, flocks of birds, swarms, herds, and life generated from simple physical, biological entities. The name of this process in science is *emergence*. G. H. Lewes (1877) introduced the concept of emergence. He considered how in a process of interaction resultants can be considered either sum or difference of different forces. Particularly the resultant is given by their sum when their direction is the same, by their difference when their directions are contrary. Moreover resultants are computable by considering their components. He observed

how it is different with processes of emergence. We may refer to his thinking by considering how in processes of emergence we have not anymore simply adding items of one kind to others of same kind, but rather, a kind of cooperation and mutual interactions between non-homogeneous and non-commensurable aspects of unlike kinds, and that the emergent cannot be reduced to their sum or their difference.

My professional life involves the study of emergence in science, and it relates directly and very practically to my life situation, in which MS and my strategy to live with it, has enabled me to continue a healthy and creative life.

**3.2 Emergence of mind for healthy and creative living.** Though continuously requiring great physical effort, oftentimes a very energy consuming process for me, I apply the fourteen points listed in Part 1. By my efforts, I am able to keep emergent my mind because it is always asking for a mission and purpose.

I think that my devotion to scientific inquiry is very compatible with the culture of my heritage which encourages us to have a continuously inquiring mind. I like to exemplify this approach in daily life by considering the difference between freedom to select among pre-established choices made available by somebody else, such as select products to buy and TV channels to watch, and freedom to design new uses of the available resources, having in mind that what we want is to make decisions about what use we make of them and not have the use of the resources determined for us. Only in this case is it possible to create something new, making it to *emerge*, such as biological and mental health. In other words, we must have the freedom to use what we have in new ways and not be limited to choices already provided for us, for example, accept eating only fast food, when we can make and eat fresh nutritious food.

Creativity *is* freedom, i.e. creativity to walk, speak, write, play, communicate, invent, and enjoy life by using in new ways available. Creativity is also the *responsibility* to use in the best ways of what we have available.

## **Conclusion**

In Part 1, I mentioned a practical approach as established in my experience to have creative living as health and health as creative living. In Part 2, I elaborated a little about how this approach is related to assuming an active role in life and how it is suitable to work in a profession, our culture and values. This approach may be understood not only as a practical recommendation. In Part 3, I mentioned how it is related to the processes of establishment of new entities and properties, that is what we call “emergence.”

I would like to conclude making reference to a specific entity, emergent from our physical reality and, in its turn, playing an important role on driving continuous processes of creating mind that in turn influences our body, and so on, round and round. To my way of thinking, how we think about our condition in life, whether we accept it passively, or emerge with new strategies to continue a healthy and creative life, makes all the difference in having a fulfilling life. In conclusion, health is for me living the creative life. Being creative is when I am able to exercise as fully as possible my strategy for healthy living.

## **Interview**

Arne Collen (AC): Why three parts and in the order you have them?

Gianfranco Minati (GM): The idea in the first part was to express some of the current values I have in my life. In the second part, how they fit with my religious background, related to my

being a Jew. And in the last part, which I like very much, is to show how not to divide scientific meaning from other possible meanings, even religious meaning. I am enthusiastic about the *continuity* between the different aspects. That is why I divided it into three parts. The first part is to introduce the listener to my personal values, my way to organize my life, that is, the operating software system I use.

AC: And all the quotations?

GM: The quotations are something very important to me, they are from books of Torah (Photograph 1). They are introduced to show the *implicit* knowledge, how the quotations are a way to understand what I introduce and how they give shape to my story, in my view, of course.



Photograph 1. The Torah, held by the second author,  
a source of direction for life and living.

It is always from my point of view. I would like to elaborate. In the first part, I state “God is my health.” I want to be very clear about this point, that I am not a fanatic. I want to say with this statement, that for me, always in my life I was interested in science, especially music. My will, my continuous desire, to try to understand is my way to honor God. I have this picture in mind, you know how it is important in the Jewish tradition, language. In the Torah, it is very very strong the idea that God creates by using language. I have especially in mind that God is continuously talking, making the becoming occurring. I mean becoming from the physical point of view, not only from the humanistic point of view, that is scientific becoming, physical and biological becoming related to any life form, related to living matter or non living matter. My idea is that my responsibility is to pay attention to this way of talking. To pay attention is to try to understand. I try to understand, not to do something else. So, my responsibility is to spend as much of my life as possible to try to understand. That is the meaning of my awe for God.

AC: OK. Are you saying also that your understanding is your way of being closer to God?

GM: Exactly. That is what I am trying to explain.

AC: Anything else you’d like to say in reference to why you chose this first quote to start your lecture?

GM: I chose it because first of all I like very much the book of Koheleth, Ecclesiastes. Second, I chose it because it reflects what I just said, “Sweet is the sleep of a laboring man whether he eats little or much; but the satiety of the rich will not suffer him to sleep” (Koheleth 5:11). In my understanding, important in life is not just build a house but become actively part of the design. In my view of course, I can’t become part of God talking without understanding. So I must do the best I can, but it is not a must. People use different approaches. Any kind of approach is

possible. There is an artistic approach, an approach based on love, and I am talking about my personal approach. This quote is to stress the *effectiveness* of not just looking for collecting richness, but the joy of being part of the God talk by itself. That is what I mean by the quote.

AC: Before you start to tell your story, you have a few more quotations. How do they fit into your presentation?

GM: I used those quotations first of all to try to explain that I had a kind of implicit religious education, not an explicit education. I remember my mother and my father told me some comments in such a conceptual context, making me elaborate some events. So when my father told me about the smile, it was very important lesson about style. Sometime you may do something that is very positive for itself but you do it in a negative way. Always it is better to do something in a positive way. This is a way to add meaning, to take care of the receiver. It is not sufficient that we send a message leaving completely to the receiver the understanding. We must also take care of the receiver, of the understanding. So we may take care by using redundancy, if it is possible, we have a suitable redundancy, like a smile. If we smile, we want to confirm that what I'm telling you is a positive thing. It is nothing against you, it is nothing forcing you, it is something very positive.

An example is the experience I had when I moved into my house. They assigned me a reserved parking place to facilitate access. At the beginning several people did not pay attention and used the parking place as a normal parking place. I had two possibilities, try to defend my parking place, or try to convince people I need this parking place. I had to induce them to respect my parking place. I used the second strategy, specifically, leaving polite notes on cars informing them they are making it difficult for me, a disabled person, and that I would appreciate very

much that they not park here in the future. Slowly people accepted this new situation with the exception of one person, who continuously was paying no attention. We met one time; we had a direct discussion. I informed him I was not going to fight about it, but asked him to kindly respect my problem. One time I was there when he was parking in my place. I asked him to move to another place available nearby, and he did. Then he approached me and said, “Now rules are respected.” I told him smiling, “Oh no, much more. You were civil and you are helping me with my situation.” Now when we meet I thank him. The second strategy was a way to develop kindness in my new relationships with my neighbors.

Another way I remember, I will never forget, related to a story my father said about the coin. He said a good coin is one having written on one side *duties* and on the other side *rights*. The source of rights, any rights, are duties. If we have coins with written duties and duties on both sides, and rights and rights on both sides, we have bad coins. It was a fantastic lesson for me. We cannot just ask for rights. We have to be very clear about the duties that generate rights, not just ask for rights.

Another point I wrote relates to the fact that doing the good is a way to *abstract*. Of course, we cannot be so presumptuous to decide what is good and what is bad. But usually to be positive, to have the idea to do something good requires abstraction and often simple reaction is more related to our personal interest and so, it is more linked to the bad. The good is assumed to be in the interest of the other, by using our model, that is, by abstracting, and not by our one interest. When we elaborate something before we react, usually we have the time to figure out something about the global situation and try, just try, to do the good. But if I immediately react, it is a kind



of animal instinct. Really, I think that to do the good asks for a higher level of abstraction. That is what I had in mind in the quotations.

AC: You tell your story as a series of remarkable events. For many people, their reaction is different from yours. It seems so difficult, they may not pull out of it. Or they react in ways they come to lead a life that isn't so creative and productive. It is not really a life through which they discover a way for healthier living and make the most of things. What do you see has made the difference, that has made it possible that you are a person who is so positive and creative, when there are so many people who are less responsive?

GM: Thank you for asking. I would like to start from an assumption well known and very important in the scientific world and to me. In science we say that to be very practical, very effective, one must have a good theory. One must be very theoretical. If not, we are just empirical. In my *scientific* understanding of religion, it is a kind of theory, a kind of *software* we use to manage our lives. I think that a religion must be useful to have a better life. A religion must be suitable to make life better. *Better* from a theoretical point of view. Not to enjoy from a materialistic point of view. And in this way, I found my core values were very important to process and model what was happening to me, to give meaning and not just to say, hah my first son died, I got MS, . . . *I'm finished*. They are just events to be modeled, to be used. There are even worse events in life--so I have *to give*, that is, to carry out a cognitive model to make the events positive for my life. And to do that I must push my level of theoretical view to a very high, high level, so it's a challenge. The challenge for another person may be to improve the level of love. People may have different reactions. For instance, I realized in making the slides that I had to understand as a prayer, not to ask for something, but let's have a prayer offering what

is going on for me. Usually people pray for something. It is very materialistic for me, an idolatrous view. It is just to offer my understanding of what was going on around me.

AC: You state values were most important. You begin to question your values, question your life and challenge yourself. Were there new values, transformation of values? I think you mention one that your dedication to theory or the belief that theory is of great value, and that if you took the higher road the larger cause beyond just yourself, feeling sorry for yourself, but look at the grander vision. Yes?

GM: Maybe I was not clear. You know it is not really a theory, my value, but the value is the process of abstraction. That is, the higher I am able to ask, then everything around me is a particular case. So the more abstract I am, the more I have the global picture in time and space. The more I understand that everything is so particular . . . My approach is *the more I abstract, the more I feel closer to God*. It is why, we never mentioned it, I feel Bach music, particularly the Art of Fugue, as an expression of that. I want to tell you why. The Bach music in my view is a music representing thinking, not a particular thought, but the process of thinking. It is why I am so enthusiastic about this music. I think there is a kind of isomorphism between this kind of music, that it is so representative of abstraction. So I don't like Bach music because it is nice. No, it is reductive to say that I *like* Bach music. It *represents* me instead, it is different. I may *like* Mozart, I may like Beethoven, I may like other kinds of music, but in the Bach music I feel represented the process of thinking. And so it behooves me very much to make high my abstractions. That is my personal description of my personal view.

AC: OK, if I understand, by abstracting the situation by looking at these events as you experience them not only exclusively to you and other people, but also by abstracting what has happened to the process of what has happened and your relation, connection with God.

GM: Yes.

AC: It was a way to see the more creative, healthy future. If one remains only seeing the relation, here is one who died, or here is one who has cancer, has MS, then you get stuck in your thinking at a very specific level, not seeing the higher potential, that there is a positive and creative possibility.

GM: Exactly. I think abstracting is a way to be free. It is a way to build meaning. Nothing to do with the truth, you know. Do you see the two paintings by my wife (Photographs 2 and 3)? She made several. Do you see they go to an end point? You see, she had the same attitude.



Photographs 2 and 3. Untitled watercolors by Fiorella Minati (1980).

AC: Yes, a pathway into the distance.

GM: Exactly, so we shared this same attitude, to deal with the more abstract. So you see the ending point is the more abstract one. We finally are free. I also want to say in contemporary life, many people are very event-dependent. They look for events, what happens today, what's new, what is going on, where can we go for a vacation, what to buy, et cetera. You know, in this case events become the owner of life, because you are looking for events.

AC: Well, look at both paintings, you see in the foreground up to the middle, there are trees, which could symbolize events. Then notice in the distance, there is a flock. It appears flying up and out of the path of the clouds. You see the clouds in both, so it is very . . . I think the pictures share the general idea.

GM: It is very metaphorical.

AC: I am looking further now. I make the inference that your mother and father (Photograph 4) were very important, in that they devoted the rest of their lives to take care of your son and yourself. Was it the values they held that you have acquired, or that you felt they were very important because there are so many ways parents can react to this situation?



Photograph 4. Parents of the second author.

GM: I always had an impression, when my mother and father were doing something, that they were inspired by an idea, by something else. Always I got this feeling from them. They always had a mission in mind. And also, I got the idea it was impossible to make explicit the mission. But I had to realize the mission. It was fantastic insight for me, all the time trying to make a parallel between my experience and my values for this difficult understanding. It is why I am so strongly interested in systemics (Minati and Collen, 1997).

AC: But you noted the importance of responsibility from your parents. How does that enter into the story?

GM: I always was shaped by the behavior of my father and my mother, giving me the evidence that they were taking care of me and especially my son, having in mind the future; we have some responsibilities. They were very strong in showing me. I give you an example. When my wife died, I was in the bedroom and they moved the body into a wood box (coffin) and she was close

to me. I was rushing to go to see her for the last time. And my mother told me, I will never forget, “Oh, please there is nothing inside the body, so please stop it.” You see what a strong reaction, don’t be idolatrous there is nothing inside. So in this moment, there was a kind of shame for my behavior. It was so stupid, so silly, so I had to focus on something else. I had to focus on what my wife was, on what I can replicate. I had to focus on that. Very strong, very strong.

AC: This helps to elaborate even further your reference to your parents passing to you what they shared, a strong sense of responsibility. What you just said is very helpful. Moving farther in the presentation.

GM: Excuse me, I want to underline my strongest feelings. I was alone when they buried my first son. I took the pictures of my wife pregnant to be buried with him. I had to bury time, a time without future, surely not to forget, but to honor it as my duty. It was so deep. Pictures were a way to represent time. And to say, I bury time. It was an experience telling me that now I had to live with time in another way. It was a challenge. Now I have to start another time. It is like life after death. I quote the Kohèlet that states “To everything there is a season, and there is a time for every purpose” at the beginning of the slide. I think there is a lot to understand about this reference. Perhaps you remember I was trying to say to you something about artificial time. I continually try to better understand because I feel I lost a lot of things. That is why I put my idea that it was first meeting with my *atemporal* life. In my view, it is an abstract life. So some time when I go in a place where I have been before with my wife, my mother, can you believe it, I say hello to us, because I can see my mother and I, or my father and I, or my wife and I, with my son and I (Photographs 5 and 6), in another time, just to show myself that I have an abstract

representation of time. And I may go through time, that is my way, I am not suggesting anything of course, it is just my experience.



Photo 5. Mother and birth of second son.

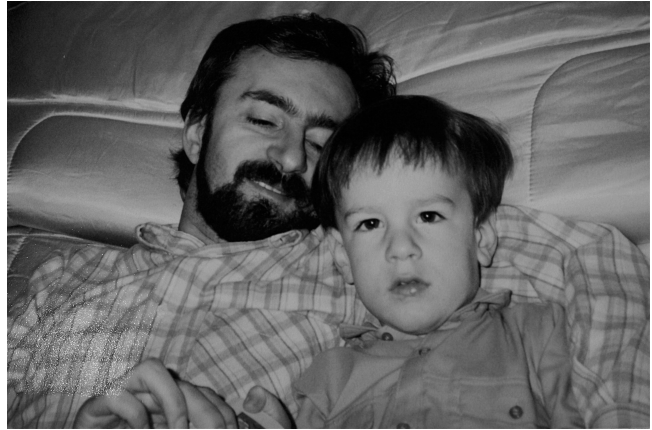


Photo 6. Father and second son.

AC: I think it illustrates nicely the abstracting as a way that you are creatively attending to what has happened and being with and living creatively. It is a remarkable insight I think. To be able to do that opens a lot of possibilities as you come across places you have been and with the people you love.

GM: Exactly. Let me, you already know the story, but I would like to repeat it. With my wife I remember we joke, when she pretended to ask me “Do you love me? Are you really sure you love me?” “Of course, I love you!” “But do you really love me more than anyone else?” And I told I her, “But, . . . well listen, you are just a person, you are not an idea of God. I love you as a human being.” And she told me, “Ah-hah, now I know that I’m going to be an idea to make you love me so much.” And she did. She became able to deal with so high level of abstraction that now I love her because she was a living theory, and also my mother and father because they were living ideas, living abstractions. So you know what I mean?

AC: You know, in a way, they become higher than there being.

GM: Exactly, that is why my mother said, “Oh please, stop it, there is nothing more inside.” So you see how challenging it is to deal with such a kind of love! Well sometime, of course, because we are just human beings, we have to deal just with events as they are, but we are constantly able to transcend this level, for instance through love. This is the important richness I got from my wife, my father and my mother, it’s why I said I had giants in my life.

AC: Well, if I’m understanding what you’re saying these central people you love so much, there is a transcendence of love to more abstract forms, so they live on, and also, I hear another way you’ve been able to live healthy and creatively with your situation, rather than other alternatives that could be very devastating and destructive.

GM: Perfect.

AC: I think that is one of the key points about your life.

GM: It is also one of the reasons I was able to survive the shame of being one of the survivors. I don’t know, but speaking of the Shoah (Holocaust), survivors had the shame psychologically to explain why they survived. I read they had the shame to say why they were survivors and the responsibility to be so. It is a shame, to say I am a survivor and enjoy to be a survivor. So you have the duty to give meaning to this abstraction.

AC: Thank you. The quotation just before you have a series of points, where you refer to co-creators, just before your list that finishes Part 1. Why this quote and why here?

GM: I tell you. I often use this quote. I just wrote a review of a book written by a physicist. I used this quotation even for that. For me, it is something so strong, because it is the idea that God brought all the animals in front of the human being, and God was looking for man to give a name to those animals “. . . to see what he would call them. . .” God didn’t know in advance what



human beings would name animals. So it is completely delegated to human beings to be co-creator, complete freedom to co-create. There are a lot of religions, cultures, approaches in the world. I focus on my experience, my values, and the Torah. I think it is really fantastic to have such a background. I said also I use the same approach because we may extend it, continuously naming new processes, new events, new problems. For instance, in my case, I had to give a name to MS. OK, we have a name, this label, MS, but I needed another name, a name able to make MS living, and living with me, and co-create something useful for us, humanity, and to do something having meaning. So I said it is what I am continuously trying to do, not something you do just once. I say it's a very energy and time-consuming process. Scientifically speaking, it's required to continuously use a new cognitive model to best use what is available and not desire what one cannot have. But it's not so easy. Sometime it's very difficult, I must be pleased not to be able to walk hand in hand with somebody. I must be pleased not to be able to take the future baby of my son in my hands because I can't. I cannot play some aspects of life as regular human beings, etc, etc, so don't use the word "can't" but use the word "won't." It is very energy consuming. But this is the way to create something new and substitute what I can't with something new. It is a way the challenge is continually be active and not passive. I use this expression: so-called *normal human beings* walk inside the context, I use the context to walk. It's completely different.

AC: Can you give an example of that?

GM: Oh yes. If I have to go to the restroom now, I need to use the chair to get up. I look around at what kind of support I have to use to reach the restroom. So when I am in my office I know in advance, but when I am in a different place, I need to figure out the path, and I need to figure out the risks, ho-ho, it looks I have to be careful, so I have to design and consider all the

probabilities. In the same way, I have to let people help me. I must be not just asking, hey Arne, I need to go to the restroom, so to do the job help me. It is an insult. I have to tell you, Arne, “I must go up the stairs, please take my walking sticks . . .” Many times people offer to help me and I have to say, no because it is very risky. They do not know *how to help*. They are very kind. But I prefer, for instance, to use stable supports rather than their arms and they do not know the suitable walking speed. I may risk to loose my balance. It is very risky. But I prefer to be active without being offensive. I use some very silly expressions to politely refuse such unsuitable help. For instance, when I have to make the stairs and someone approaches me to give me an arm, I say I prefer to do it by myself, “because now I know the job.” It is so important for me to react politely. I say something silly and just smile.

AC: What you say is so significant, the manner in which one perceives and uses one’s environment. You remind me of an experience that is very important in my life. When I was much younger and approached my thirties, I lost most of the hair on top of my head, and it was very easy for me to get sunburn. My father who is bald had developed a pre-cancerous condition for the skin, so I was very aware of it. What I noticed is that after getting burnt in the sun a few times, I changed the way I looked at the environment. I noticed by the sun not where the light was, but where the shadows were. So the environment changed its presentation to me, or in other words, the way I perceived the environment. Thus, like you say, when you get up to go to the bathroom, when you are going from one place to another, you look at the world in terms of what supports the world is giving you, making them available to help you to go from here to there. In my case, when the sun is out, I look for the shadows to help me so that I do not get burnt in the sun. Perhaps we have a very parallel kind of perception?

GM: Yes, yes. Sometimes I have a very difficult situation when I give some lectures at the university. When I am alone, I use the computer, I sit. When there are two colleagues giving a presentation, we discuss, always I have to manage, because the other person is very kind but he doesn't realize my operational limits. For instance, she or he uses the blackboard, but I can't. So how can I write something using the blackboard while she or he writes and says something or tells me to write? I need to manage. It is possible but it is just a challenge.

AC: We are almost through the list of slides in Part 1. If you have anything else to elaborate before we go to the second part, please do.

GM: I just want to elaborate a bit more about "walking in the context and using the context" to emphasize how it is important to have an active, not a passive approach. In Part 1 the reference is to an attitude toward physicians and medicines. For some people, health is just working with the physician to *resume* health as a previous biological state. The question is "Please help me to resume my previous biological state because I do not feel so well." It's a kind of passive state, waiting for the physician to say take this medicine and so and so. That is one attitude. Another one is not to be passive at all. It is to say, "Well maybe I need some medicine, but for most of the job, I have to be active." Sometimes I take medicine. I do not want to say I am against taking medicine. But I want to be active. So what does it mean to be active? In my view, it means not that I need to feel better, but that I have to do something. Not to enjoy a healthy state just to feel better. No, I need to feel better because I have to do this and this and this. An active attitude is required when I have to go to some place--you know it is very comfortable to stay in my office--but sometimes I have to travel, for instance when I come to the U.S. That is particularly new and challenging. I must change the language, the context, so I must be particularly active to do that.

That relates to a short elaboration of what was introduced in Part 1. It applies even to Part 2 when I say *using* constraints rather than *avoiding* constraints. We need to continuously invent new ways to play at everything. There is nothing we can't do; there is just another way to do them.

AC: So as a set, as a collection, a system of these things interacting, this strategy (Slide 2) of interacting for healthy, creative living, this is a dynamic set of characteristics you describe what you have adopted to make life creative and healthy. That finishes Part 1. OK, we are going to discuss Part 2 of your presentation, the God of Torah. I see some quotes. Tell me about your placement of them.

GM: Actually, in all the presentation, I have some quotations from Koelet I introduced this small section in reference to a quotation by Rabbi Rothman. I like very much what he said. Judaism teaches we are not to construe ourselves to be *puppets under external control in the hands of God*, but we are partners with God in the ongoing process of evolution, change and growth. I like this idea very much, because I feel so close. For instance, I give you an example making reference to creationists. They say everything being created by God. Self- or guided-evolutionary processes are not allowed in creation. I think it is really an insult, because we say, hah-hah, we not take any responsibility, so creation is very static. Everything is in the hands of God. I think it is an insult to use this name to say God has done everything, we just have to accept it, ... *very low level*.

Another part I like very much to emphasize in this short discussion is reference to Ecclesiastes 20, I quote making reference to the suggestion don't make images as pictures. What I like very much is the challenge to understand what is written in this paragraph, not as a restriction, an

order or imposition, *you have not to make images*. It looks silly because we just have to take pictures using our eyes. At the moment we wake up, we open our eyes, we make pictures. So it looks silly if you take what is literally written. No, no don't produce images of something on paper, on wood on any support. Well, my enthusiasm is related to the idea, of course we can make any picture we want, but don't assume pictures as something static, in my view, it refers to idolatry. So you see, just don't focus on pictures, but pictures in this case are also concepts. Don't focus on static concepts; everything must be dynamic. Everything must be evolutionary. Don't focus on what you have now. That is why I added the other reference by Rabbi Mehlman. "The pictures are moving now. Let us move forward with them." Any kind of picture, even in science, we say now we have a good theory of the movement of planets, Newtonian theory, so we say we are all set, so stop, don't make any more research. We did the opposite. We developed several new theories, new approaches. We continuously do that. I think that we have to do that not only in science but also for ourselves, continuously.

I do not want to focus on my memories. The memories I have of my wife, my son, my mother are words to continuously produce new statements. They are not just words to repeat forever. That is the core aspect I had in mind to emphasize in this part. The reason why I made reference to the Torah is to have such a kind of God, asking, supporting, requiring, inviting, to always assume a dynamical approach, not a static approach, not to repeat. As when we pray, as a machine, put in a coin and the machine repeats the prayer. It is very silly, very silly. There must be an opportunity to do something new. Every time we read the Torah is a new (oral, living Torah) in respect to the written one.

It is the same in my opinion when I am listening to music. It is not just to repeat the same music, but to invent a new way to understand this music, and it is the same when we look to our family. I would like to take this opportunity to say how in cognitive science, in the past the idea of memory was to understand memory as storage, where we are able to find something. The new model is a subsystem able to reconstruct continuously what we are looking for, continuously because the same memory is not always the same, depending on the global situation of the cognitive system.

I think today, and I am very pleased to live in this age, that we have the opportunity to continuously design the bridges between the different worlds. I like this expression, *to recognize one into the other*. To recognize artistic values in science, and science in artistic values. You know, I do not think I am really saying something new. Leonardo di Vinci did the same. Leonardo di Vinci studied the human body through sketching what he saw. You know it was forbidden in his time to dissect bodies. But he did. And Michelangelo also. Because they needed scientific knowledge to be good artists. In many of his artistic drawings Leonardo illustrated mechanical inventions he could imagine that could not exist and be scientifically explained in his time. More and more we need artistic knowledge to be good scientists. I am not inventing that. That is why I was very pleased to add Part 3, introducing a very personal scientific view about what is very peculiar about the establishment of mind. In the literature there is a kind of continuity between such concepts as mind, soul, and spirituality. I am not here to say I want to identify some specific boundaries. I am against doing that. I think there is some continuity. What we call soul may be an aspect of mind, and mind may be an aspect of spirituality. I speculate; I don't know really. I am not going into this business, because I have not the expertise. I'm not so

interested; it is not my area. I want only to say a few words about possibly a new approach to the concept of mind. Do we have time?

AC: Yes.

GM: We introduced in the presentation some ideas about the concept of emergence. I am not here to repeat what I presented, but the concept of emergence is not new at all. I used a quotation from Lewes (1877), who introduced the concept of emergence. It is possible to identify the concept even earlier in the Greek literature, and as much as we want. The idea of emergence is that while a system possesses properties, the same system may acquire new unexpected properties. The examples we listed at the beginning are a team consisting of single players, a flock of birds, a corporation, and life itself generated from simpler biological entities. So there is a huge literature about this area of research. It is also my area of interest.

I want to focus a little on how it is possible to consider that systems, specifically, living systems, may have either the possibility to have some processes of emergence within themselves, for instance, acquiring cognitive processes, the ability to learn, and the ability to produce some logical inferences. We are still not very clear today; these are areas of research. We are not clear, for instance, what consciousness is. One approach has been to understand consciousness as the representation of representation. I have the experience I am living, but at the same time I have the representation of this. So one idea of consciousness is having not only what I am living now, but also its representation.

At the same time, another idea having the general name of a very complicated property acquired by sophisticated living beings is the mind. I'm not elaborating much about what I mean, but what is interesting is the challenge. We are familiar today with phenomena we call visual

phenomena. We have virtuality made by computers, now we are familiar with pictures, moving, simulating the real world without the body. We just switch on TV and we see people making any kind of action without a material body. It is totally different than to go to the theater. At the theater you have real people doing something. Another example is that if you go to the theater to enjoy music, but we may stay at home, just push the button and switch on the hi-fi and enjoy the music. So we have music without the orchestra. There is an old scientific theory called artificial life. We have another theory called synthetic biology. The aim was to simulate by computers evolutionary process. What I am considering and am very pleased to have the opportunity to introduce this idea on this occasion, we may figure out this scientific aim, the ability to support the emergent processes of mind without a body, to simulate the emergence of mind without the body. I just want to say that in my view, it is exactly to say it is the path in many religions they call the eternal life. So the mind after death. That is exactly the same.

AC: Immortality?

GM: Exactly. I give an example, a very practical example. I may give a really short example, but for me it is my understanding. In three of the four gospels, it is written very clearly, but I am sure in many other religions, that those *who have, will have more, and who will have not sufficiency, who will also loose what they have*. I am not sure about my English, but I find the precise reference. [Pause]

AC: It looks to be in Mathew 13:9, “Whom ever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Who ever does not have, even what he has, will be taken from him.”

GM: Thank you. Same concept is in Luke (11:27) and Mark (4:25). I understand it very related to Genesis (9:5): “And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an



accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.” So the idea I think it is a religious way to explain the emergence of mind. I want to give a very simple example in physics. In physics we have the so-called phase transitions. An example is the transformation of water into ice. When we reach a specific temperature, the process occurs. The process does not occur in a *yes or no* way. When the temperature is very close to zero, the water is becoming very cold. When the temperature decreases very slowly it is possible to have the water still in a liquid phase even at temperature less than zero. In physics we call this a meta-stable condition, when it is sufficient to reduce the temperature very little and pow, you have the transformation into ice. So the metaphoric idea is that if in your personal story in life you have the ability to reduce the temperature and you reduced sufficiently to reach the critical point for the phase transition, then you have the phase transition occurring. But if in your life, you were able to reach any low temperature getting close to the phase transition point, but at the very last moment when control is lost, the critical point is not reached, then you will start to reverse the process and the temperature will increase leaving far from the possibility for the phase transition to occur. At the very last moment, sorry, we accept only zero or less. So we loose what we accumulated over the years. I think it is a fantastic metaphor for mind. So, if in your life, you had the process for the emergence of mind, so intense, mind will be able to survive the death of your generating device that is the body. If you had a mind so-so, you enjoy life from a materialistic point of view, you didn’t reach a critical point and you weren’t able to reach the eternal situation for mind. I am not saying it is true. Of course, it is just a metaphor meaningful to me.

AC: But mind would be at the extreme of more rather than less. You are saying that if you reach the critical point of abundance you will go through the phase transition to eternal . . .

GM: Exactly. It takes energy to reduce temperature. It takes energy to keep mind emergent. If you put sufficient energy to reduce temperature, to keep mind emergent, you will break the transition point. If not, no. The idea may not only be religious. It may also depend on the biological device acquiring mind. We may consider mind merging from simple living beings and assume that it is impossible for such living beings to develop such a mind, to reach this critical point, because of physical reasons. I do not want say this is true. I just want to say how exciting is it to have multiple concepts of understanding between religion and science.

AC: It is interesting that those on a spiritual path, that spend their lives devoted to meditation and related practices at some time may reach a critical point where a phase transition occurs, or at death such a phase transition may occur, to look at that in relation to the major religions and to Buddhism.

GM: There are different possible paths available. I don't want to say what I say is true. I want just to say it is very exciting to have the freedom to imagine this possibility. We are not only free, but also we invite people to have different approaches. I just want to share with you my personal experience, my personal path. I'm not here to try to sell this particular approach. Just to share this approach.

AC: Bringing closure to the third part, are there any comments you would like to make as to how you come to conclusions?

GM: For me, this part is the conceptual conclusion. It is always related to what I am trying to share. It is related to freedom, to always be active. The idea that we always have to try to avoid

to conceive freedom only as the ability to select among what is available but to design. Freedom is the ability to design new things. When we select we depend on those who established what we have available. But the freedom is to invent, to use what we have available to invent new models, new approaches. I think it really is our responsibility to use the fantastic resources in our mind and body. What I elaborated a little about emergence of mind in my view is something really fantastic and it relates to research we have today.

In my view, we may understand this area of research as an effort to keep emergent processes even when we remove the material support. To keep mind without the triggering generating body, or we say to keep the music without the orchestra, images without the bodies, et cetera. There are so many possibilities. I think it is an important area of research to make nonmaterial the processes in the future, because we have a science focusing very much and very successfully on the material aspects of processes. Now in science we are moving more and more on nonmaterial properties. So I think it is the future at very different levels of description involving different interdisciplinary views. I think this new adventure will be central for human beings, because to me, human beings are the generators of the knowledge, of the processes, of the models. We more and more study the uniqueness of human beings. We will be able to better understand this uniqueness and better understand what consciousness is. Today we have some hypotheses. They are very limited. And still we are not clear why we want to understand what consciousness is.

I take this opportunity to say something I like very much, found in several papers I wrote. In science, we may say that experiments are answers made by Nature to our questions. So when we have a question, we design an experiment and Nature answers by making experiments occur. It is

interesting to say that there are not answers in Nature without questions. Sometimes we have something that looks so strong as questions. For instance, if someone says I am doing something and I see a fire, I didn't know fire before, and now I see fire. In an objectivistic view, they say we discover the fire. In the constructivistic view we may say that we must invent the proper question for this answer, that is, give cognitive existence to an input detected. Always we are in charge to invent the proper question, even when we find something so unexpected as a fire, one kind of physical phenomenon. We must invent the proper question. I think we still have not the proper questions for consciousness.

I would like to finish with this point regarding the question, "What is consciousness?" A superficial question. We need to elaborate more to have the possibility to understand more, and not expect our understanding of consciousness to be clear, ah-hah, now it's clear. OK, next problem. Not at all. I take it that if we have more knowledge about consciousness, we will be more free to design new questions and to better understand the freedom for ourselves. So I would like to finish with this point: The ability to design questions for understanding what consciousness is, but understanding in quotations, because it is a very large subject.

AC: We are at conclusion. Any final words?

GM: Over the decades I have been able to transform challenges into positive experiences. These transformations include sharing my life with a companion the past twelve years (Photograph 7). Having a companion was unexpected. Life is full of the unexpected. God is everywhere we let God in. It reminds me of the metaphor of the water that travels through the mountain that is our life blood and it emerges in the most unexpected places, as for example beneath the road in the park Selva di Grigno in the Valsugana Valley, south of my childhood home and village

(Photograph 8). It is a metaphor for me that inspires me to health as my creative living and creative living as my health.



Photograph 7. Second author with companion.



Photograph 8. Metaphor for health as creative living and creative living as health.

AC: That's it. Thank you very much.

GM: It was my pleasure. Thank you for the opportunity.

## **Discussion**

To prepare for our discussion of the interview transcript, we read through the above conversation on three occasions, editing out words tangential to the interview. This preliminary exercise primed us to bring into the foreground some essential themes discussed in the paragraphs to follow.

Before we proceed to discuss what emerged for us from our dialog about the lecture, a caution has to be mentioned. We do not refer to those whose disability occurred at birth; that is another story. Over our life span we are certain to acquire various disabilities by aging. Or temporarily, we may break a leg, go through pregnancy, and loose income and financial

resources. In this view, a disability is a lack of resources we previously had available. This point of view requires a suitable strategy, for example that created by the second author (Slide 2), to work with the resources that remain.

## **Personal and Therapeutic Aspects**

Though life is not something one survives, it is increasingly a challenge the longer we live. And if a severe event occurs to alter our well being, such as the case of the second author, the challenge to live a fulfilling and creative life takes on special meaning. The second author made a choice, which he has to renew every day in his responsiveness to what he has available. To the first author, this remarkable attitude with which he accepts and construes his daily life with a dedication to a positive responsibility and freedom serves as an inspiration to others.

Clearly by his choice of title, “Creativity as my health, and health as my creativity,” and the substance of his talk, he expounds on the approach that health is not something to be protected and maintained. Such ideas so prevalent in our contemporary ways of thinking about our health seem impoverished and unrealistic. Health has to be continuously generated. Generating daily health is living. In this view, there are many ways to generate health. To reiterate, it is not about protecting but generating. There are two constructs that seem particularly relevant and illustrative in this case. Firstly, we may point to the manner in which the second author accepted, contemplated, and transformed his epiphanies described in the lecture and discussed in our dialog that seem particularly illustrative of positive change and transformation described by McDonald (2008). Secondly, we may stress the ongoing and continuous personal process of the second author to generate his fluid center to embody his strategy (Slide 2) that seem illustrative of the awe-based approach to experiencing and engaging in daily living described by Schneider

(2003); whereby in this case, education, vocation, experiencing awe, and personal reflection converge to regenerate and reconstitute his being daily.

In the Jewish community of the second author, he is fond to point out to the first author that to be responsible is a source of life and meaning in life. To be responsible is not a constraint, duty and obligation to others, as many persons prefer to define responsibility. To the contrary, it is a degree of freedom. This insight has been of immense value in converging his religious faith in support of his predicament.

What the first author found to be uniquely important and special about the case is the choice the second author made when faced with his situation. His turn to a more human oriented approach and positive attitude to make the best of his situation are truly remarkable. His attitude and response style to seemingly insurmountable challenge relates the case to the literature on posttraumatic growth (p ex Bozo et al, 2009; Chun and Lee, 2008; Hefferon et al, 2009; Parappully et al, 2002; Solomon, 2004; Weiss, 2005), and resilience and hardiness (Maddi, 2004; Maddi et al, 2009). To the second author, our collaboration to provide this article is demonstrative as an act of responsibility to share his experience by means of the lecture, interview and discussion that is this article. Interested readers may find more ideas and comments in his “letter to matter” (Minati, 2010).

The idea of *critical point* is considered to be something we witness more in hindsight. Many challenges in life lead one to a critical point, or what may become a critical point, but at what point the change is evident is of course very specific to the person and usually realized after the fact. For example, at what point would a series of happenings lead a person to commit suicide, another person to seek divorce, another to propose marriage, and so forth. The metaphor of phase

transition is meaningful to us, for example slowly reducing the temperature of water, such that when the critical point is reached, the water suddenly crystallizes into ice. Critical points in our lives we seem to experience like this metaphor. We recognize the metaphor may have great potential for therapeutic applications. Whether applied to oneself or one's patients and clients, the thematic emergence (building up of life happenings) toward a critical point may possibly be recognized in advance. That is the challenge and benefit, in that one has the freedom to recognize what is happening and intervene to steer one's well being. In this view, this approach is ongoing and daily in generating creative and healthy living. It seems commonsense, but how often and to what extent do most of us engage in this way of living daily? Why allow a critical point to be reached that may end life? An unhealthy life style, based upon processed food diet and sedentary habits, is an outstanding example. In cases where a critical point has already occurred, one can study what has happened and embark on a phase transition of amelioration to prevent its reoccurrence, that is, take a deliberate series of actions to generate as healthy and creative daily living as one can with what is available. The case of the second author illustrates the latter situation nicely, and the strategy (Slide 2) constitutes his action plan for well being, in other words, his creative and healthy approach to daily life.

Exercising the strategy (the set of ways one adopts to respond to situation and circumstance) connects and engages one with the environment in constructive and creative ways that cannot be overstated. Attitude supports and guides action, which in turn confirms responsiveness, that manifests the responsibility and freedom one has.

The attitude of challenge that makes the most of what one has available is a very open minded and forward looking approach. One is always engaging with the surroundings for



opportunities to facilitate intentions and actions, without fostering reliance and dependency on others. Through daily application of his strategy (Slide 2), the emphasis of the second author on authenticity, choice, compassion, freedom, intentionality, and presence, in the view of the first author, situates the case squarely with the humanistic-existential perspective (Schneider and May, 1995).

One final point is important to mention, because it pervaded implicitly the context in which our collaboration has proceeded successfully. Our relationship rests on trust and humor established over many years working together. Though not evident in the lecture and interview of this article, the first author was struck by these two characteristics evident in the published dialogues between Elizabeth and Jim Bugental (Bugental, 2009) that exemplifies their importance in the humanistic-existential perspective and to the case covered in our article. From our point of view, humor is healthy and essential to live with seemingly insurmountable challenge. Trust and humor exemplify not only key qualities the first author experiences in knowing the second author, but also experiencing his approach to embody genuinely creative and healthy living.

## **Methodological Aspects**

There are aspects of the process we have followed to generate this article that may be of value to those doing human oriented forms of research. We wish to point to the versatility and relevance that our collaboration has for case study research. There is a range of emphases (perspectives if you prefer) that can be taken doing case study research, and knowing any one or more of them helps researchers to fulfill the aims of their inquiry. This case is demonstrative as such.

There may be merit in applying such constructs as epiphany (McDonald, 2008), fluid center and awe (Schneider, 2003) as core aspects of a methodological framework for designing and conducting case study research. Certainly, it has been useful in our case study. It should be evident we had a propensity towards hermeneutic and phenomenological types of cases study method in conducting this case study; and we were influenced by Edwards (1998), Kvale (1996), and van Manen (1990).

To the extent that story telling served the process of our collaboration the case study becomes more narrative as inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). We see a great mix here, in that we both have a strong tendency to think about and comment on the stories we are telling, often even before we finish them. This mix of methodological bias from the purely narrative and phenomenological on the one hand to an influx of the hermeneutic on the other hand makes it difficult to classify our process under any of these labels, though it was clear to us the influence of all these approaches to research on us while conducting our inquiry.

What may be less known and side-lined is the fact that our collaboration as inquiry was intentionally that: collaborative. Our attitudes that have supported our collaboration are ones of mutual respect, not trying to impress each other with what we may know, and not arguing to insist who is right and who is wrong on any point in which we discover a difference in views between us. For clarification, when such a collaboration becomes central to the inquiry, it may be informative to state that had the second author been using our collaborative process to write his autobiography, one might refer to this genre as collaborative autobiography as a means to conduct this form of human oriented research; and if the first author was writing the biography of the second author, one could properly term his method collaborative biography. More often than

not, many autobiographies and biographies of still living subjects entailed either one or the other form of inquiry.

The case we have been studying has great potential for becoming a systemic case study, in that multiple perspectives can be included in the description of the case. The particular set of perspectives provides a rich description that would not be present when only one perspective extensively dominates, overshadowing all others. The systemic approach to case study research has high potential in this particular case, though we scratched the surface here, because both authors bring to the inquiry various knowledge domains that can enrich the inquiry; p ex Minati and Collen (1997). Specifically, converging the second author's experience of his religious heritage with his professional work in systemics, and his knowledge of mathematics, physics, and cognitive science enabled multiple perspectives to become present in the data of the case.

Surely the most intriguing and difficult approach we have taken is hermeneutic, making use of three levels of interpretation. The lecture is an account of the second author reflective of much indwelling upon his predicament. It communicates what he has reaped and integrated into his life to engage daily in creative and healthy living. Obviously it is autobiographical, and we could have proceeded along these lines by more extensive descriptions of major events, had our intention been an autobiographical case study report. But our purpose was adequately served by a brevity of detail more for context to prepare for thematic explication.

The transcript of the interview is tantamount to another interpretive layer. It is through his elaboration of his illustrated lecture with prompts from the first author that a deeper elucidation of meaning in the original lecture emerges. At this more abstract level of interpretation than comprehending the lecture, we saw value in conducting a dialog about the lecture, with the

device of following it from start to finish, for the purpose of generating another level (layer) of interpretation upon (along side) the first. We did this without any prior expectation other than fostering our collaboration to bring forth more details that may not be that evident from the lecture (first layer) itself. It also gave the second author an opportunity to add clarity he felt may not be sufficiently present, and hence, his influence (bias) brought to creating the second layer. The first author, as participant observer, also could add (his bias) to the interpretation by the nature of questions asked of the second author and any comments and observations that he thought might be of relevance to the body of evidence from which we would draw key points about the case. With both the lecture and dialog recorded, the first author transcribed the tape to make available the second level of interpretation. It created the condition we needed to move to the third level (layer) of interpretation.

The third phase of our collaboration is the convergence of the two earlier levels (layers) to enable a fuller and more explicit set of findings to communicate the case. We reread the lecture followed by the transcript for two iterations, three readings, each time the first author writing out our interpretation of what was discussed. As we did this, it proved efficacious to go back and forth between the lecture and transcript to generate and refine the third level (layer) of interpretation. Although space does not permit an entire reproduction of the third layer, we selected and culled from it to write much of the discussion of this article, that is, what we agreed were the more important key points to include in this article. The last phase of our collaboration was the more interesting for us, having the two prior layers available to compare and contrast to arrive at key points that were declarative of mutual confirmation (consensual validation), that also acted to knit all layers of interpretation to the heart of the case.

One might argue for a fourth level of interpretation. The reflexive quality of our discussion was intended as part of our strategy of collaboration to complete the article. We wanted our process of collaboration to converge in order to more thoughtfully know to what essential meanings and points of value in the thinking of the second author that would bring us to conclude our collaboration. Our desire is that this phase of our collaboration might be of added value as well to others. It also became an opportunity to reflect upon our journey to discuss whether there might be any area for improvement. And it did happen for the first author, specifically, in reaffirming an insight of earlier years of the importance in human relations that healthy and creative living is linked to the positive always outweighing the negative, that negative sources of information coming into and being shared in the relationship can act to tip the balance to the negative with adverse consequences upon one's health. Finally, we placed in context the lecture and dialog by applying our ideas to many contemporary problems that a challenged person faces today, as well as compassionately sharing our personal challenges of aging, the first author now in his sixth decade and the second author in his fifth decade of life.

## **Conclusion**

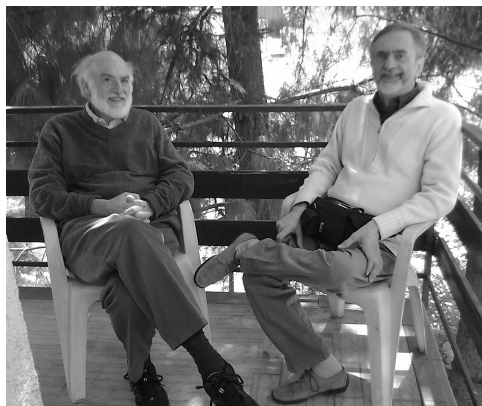
We came to several conclusions that can be highlighted. It is critically important to generate positive experiences to fill as much of the day as one can. The positive should always outweigh the negative. That situations and circumstances have a positive side, no matter how negative they may appear. That we have much more power than we often give credit to ourselves to turn the negative into a positive, but to see the positive in what we are experiencing and not dwell into the negative can seem to be an almost insurmountable challenge. The attitude and strategy to work with what we have available have to be an ongoing part of daily life. It is our responsibility,

and in so acting, we engage in creative and healthy living. Key is an appreciative attitude toward the situation and circumstance one finds oneself, to perceive, relate to, and act in creative and health promoting ways with what one has available.

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