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Making Meanings With Friends

Two Women's Storytelling and Dialogue



Fifteen years ago, Cindy Marshall, a close friend and a scholar/teacher with whom I worked, talked, sang, and laughed for a number of years before her untimely death, returned home to Maine for the summer. We had discussed several times my interest in studying recordings of friends talking together. Cindy was kind enough to speak with several people in Maine who she thought might be interested in tape recording some of their time spent talking as close friends. She informed these persons that their spoken words would be closely scrutinized and written about by me, a professor and a scholar of friendship with whom Cindy worked. Many of them were surprised to learn that scholars actually were studying how friends communicate and were eager to participate in the project. The freely offered and

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naturally occurring discourse of one pair of these participants provides the primary basis for this chapter's discussion.

There was no interview protocol or schedule of questions guiding these two friends' interaction other than the fact that they knew I was interested in their friendship. Their talk went where they took it during their shared "vivid present" (Schutz, 1970). Nearly everything I say about these friends I have gleaned from listening repeatedly to them talk with each other across 90 minutes of audiotaped interaction, transcribing their conversation, and studying their transcribed words. Some years after publishing an earlier discussion of their conversation (Rawlins, 1998a), I met the two women whom I refer to below using the pseudonyms Karen and Chris. Having read my published account, each informed me how impressed she was by the accuracy of my insights about their friendship, saying independently that I was "dead-on" and "had nailed it." At that time I thanked them for their encouraging feedback and again for sharing with me the opportunity to learn from their lively, revealing conversation and to write about their discourse as friends. Profoundly for me, I was able to express my gratitude to them in the very room where they recorded the interaction I engage with again in this chapter.

By their own reckoning early in the conversation, Karen and Chris have been friends for some "thirty years and counting." One late summer day it rained in Maine, and Karen took the afternoon off from her job at a local swimming pool. She and Chris met at her home; Karen put a microphone in a coffee cup on the table between them, turned on and tested the cassette tape recorder, and they began to talk about their lives and friendship. The tape machine clicked off after the first 45 minutes, whereupon they cooked a meal together, sat down to eat, flipped the cassette over, turned the recorder back on again, and talked for another 45 minutes.

Numerous vibrant, touching, funny, quizzical, mundane, and panoramic moments appear throughout their recorded talk. I am fascinated by the depth and variety of meanings their interaction exhibits. I have studied relational communication for 30 years yet am struck continually by just how nested each woman's life is with the other's. Their families, memories, trips, jobs, judgments, disappointments, and possibilities intertwine. At several points I have taken out maps of Maine and the United States, even a globe, trying to visualize their mentioned locations and travels. Among topics specifically involving their friendship, I have also reflected on sailing, parenting, the breaking and mending of bones, hearts and homes. I have heard laughter, strained and absent voices, individual and shared worlds being constructed or rebuilt.

I believe their conversation exemplifies the attributes of storytelling and dialogue between friends discussed in Chapter 3. The narrative qualities of their interaction are apparent in their practices of expressing and trying to comprehend each other's meanings for the events of their lives and friendship, and exploring their respective points of view. They make the effort to speak their outlooks and listen carefully to each other, performing the connected basis of their identities through their discourse. They also seek to understand how events unfold in time through each other's stories. I notice moments of dialogue interwoven with their storytelling through their questioning and responding to each other's points of view on matters of shared concern. These women communicate respect for each other's personhood while openly acknowledging the similarities and differences in their identities. Sustaining mutual involvement throughout their unfolding conversation, they preserve their own convictions while remaining open to each other's influence. They also demonstrate the limits of their dialogues.

I am convinced that it is impossible for me to say anything that remotely approaches the richness and vitality of their interaction as it actually occurred, much less objectively account for its "variance." Neither am I interested in identifying through formal conversational analysis the "routine methods" these women ostensibly utilize to accomplish the sequences of talk I present here. Instead, I want to narrate my perceptions of the overall contours of their talk together. I will re-present selected portions of their discourse, and offer interpretations of the communicative practices and features of narrative and dialogue I perceive these women accomplishing in their talk as friends. In short, I want to share with you my experience of these moments of their friendship as composing both a *dialogue of narratives* and a *narrative of dialogues*.

❖ BEGINNING THE CONVERSATION AND THE STORY OF KAREN AND CHRIS'S FRIENDSHIP

Karen: That says "Record Battery," and I don't know why that's on; I don't know if this is recording. My name is Karen Wilson.

Chris: My name is Chris Keyser.

Karen: And we have been friends [laughing] for thirty years.

[Tape recorder turns off.]

Chris: Isn't that in the middle? [referring to the microphone]

Karen: Okay.

Chris: The microphone is in the coffee cup between us. Now let's see what happens [laughing].

Karen: [Laughs] Okay.

Chris: Thirty years and counting . . .

Karen: Thirty years and counting, yes, okay, we, we got to be friends first in Burlington, Vermont, which is not where we are now . . .

Chris: No, our husbands were acquainted.

Karen: Our husbands taught at the same school.

The conversation begins with attention to the task of managing the tape recorder. In their opening discourses they individually state their names (using identical sentence forms). Following Karen's lead, they laughingly recognize themselves as friends for "thirty years." Chris modifies the description into "Thirty years and counting . . .," registering the ongoing nature of their relationship, which Karen repeats. They self-identify as persons who met through their husbands in a different city from where they now live. The women commence this co-told story of their friendship utilizing the narrative convention of starting at its chronological beginning. From the beginning of this tape they connect their individual identities with their friendship over considerable and still unfolding time, and with respect to their husbands.

It soon becomes apparent in co-telling the narrative of their first meeting at a cocktail party and talking there about enjoying summers in Maine that the women have different stories about who first came to live in Maine permanently and when and how it was accomplished. Establishing their individual and shared positions on this question of "Who stayed first?" becomes a matter of weaving together personal stories that differ in nuanced yet seemingly significant ways concerning time lines. Each narrates linear sequences of events contingent upon co-occurring configurations of relationships with her respective parents and increasingly problematic husband. The shared story of their friendship is simultaneously a negotiated story of their individuated lives. For example:

Chris: The only reason I went back to Burlington later that fall was to have a legal confrontation . . .

Karen: Um hm [sort of laughing in a knowing way]

Chris: Uh huh [mildly laughing] with my husband

Karen: Uh . . .

Chris: and the lawyers, etc., etc. because I had absolutely no money, and so they were trying to rectify that. And then I came back on the Greyhound Bus. And stayed.

Karen: Well, here we are on this tape and I've gotta say that's news to me.

Chris: [Laughs turning into a brief dry cough] Unless I'm really . . .

Karen: Really! No I had it in my mind that *we* had come here first. I mean to stay.

Performing this initial dialogue of their personal narratives during the tape recording produces explicitly acknowledged "news" to Karen about this question of "Who stayed first?" The answer nevertheless seems to have only provisional status for the two friends. After the passage quoted above, Chris tries another approach to establish a shared chronology (that the friends employed at other junctures during their conversation). She uses the birth year and resulting age of one of her children to locate relevant events of the friends' lives in time. Even this seemingly objective method is not satisfactory although it doesn't seem to matter to the friends:

Karen: I think maybe there were some years in there that we've both lost. [laughing] We've shuffled . . .

Chris: We've shuffled. [laughing] Well, never mind, let's go on.

I find this echoed notion of shuffling suggestive. On one hand, it harks to the sequential jumbling of playing cards in a deck as analogous to rearranging events of linear time. Meanwhile, what these women actually have "shuffled" are configurations of interrelated, meaningful events and people—like configurations of suits depicted on playing cards. This locution also trades on the figurative notion of the "hands" persons are dealt and draw at different moments in their lives.

Then the women narrate their divorces from their first husbands. Their co-telling of each story involves one friend encouraging the other to clarify her points of view on the related events. As well, they support the other's pluck, decisions, and positive self-image in the face of transgressions by these men. Yet each person's story also embodies one more self-promoting take on the "chronology" of their permanent

relocations in Maine; it suggests how she was the first to come “to stay.” Differing subject positions continue to swim in the waters of their shared narratives. Even so, Karen provides a coda for this opening section of their conversation that returns them to a narrative present emphasizing similarity: “So now Chris is divorced and Karen is divorced.”

In their talk the women sort through sequences and configurations of involvements and choices that transpired in the past. In Mink’s (1970) terms, they are co-telling the story of their lives as friends “having followed” it up to now. There are, however, any number of “impression points” (Kepnes, 1992) from their lives that they could select to focus on together. Part of the dialogue—that is, the back and forth exchange of viewpoints, questions, and responses—of their co-narration concerns deciding precisely which events, characters, and versions of selves they will relate together. They also decide together the significance these happenings held then and now for them as the key protagonists. Among other issues, they are establishing together the meanings for each woman of her “was and is self” (Barros, 1998), that is, her self in the past and her self now.

❖ NARRATING DIVERGING LIFE PATHS

Urged on by Karen, Chris then narrates an extended period of her life that discloses important facets of her existence and identity that differ from her friend. Her story begins with her dating a lobster fisherman, deeply enjoying his island house with their combined four children, marrying him, and moving into his large home in a harbor town. She continues:

Chris: And we commenced to have stepchildren and children and all manner of things. Dogs and many cats and all this menagerie. And I became a stern person in the summer weather. (heh heh)

Karen: (hm hm hm)

Chris: What luck. And after a couple years we bought, our mutual interest in a boat, we bought a large sailing vessel, a schooner, in preparation for charting the seas of the world. [laughs] And uh at some point we, after two or three years of false starts and things, we did actually sail the schooner to Florida and the Bahamas and back again. And uh, although I didn’t

realize it at the time, that put paid to that marriage. [laughs]
So that was that.

Karen: [laughs]

Chris: After some time had gone by, we separated . . . And Karen was always there and always supportive to me through all these vicissitudes, the good and the bad, the ups and the downs, and we could really lay it on each other.

Asked by Karen about the origins of her persistent interest in travel, Chris continues her story. Separated now from her second husband, convinced he was seeing other women and weary of the cold Maine winters, she “flew the coop” and began traveling repeatedly to warmer climes—Florida, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. She describes an epiphany that occurred on one of her trips: “This is what I want! Hot sand, ocean!” Drawing on her experiences sailing with her second husband and working as a breakfast cook during the winter in Maine, she landed a job with a yacht charter venture in the Virgin Islands. In narrative terms she exclaims, “That was the second big chapter in eye opening and feeling like this is where I belong.” Even so, she eventually returned to Maine due to “the pull of my kids” and the fact she “still wasn’t divorced!” The latter condition she recalls and exclaims in a whisper during her telling. Chris’s tale portrays a free spirit, someone who likes warm weather and all things nautical, with the moxie and resourcefulness to pursue and support her excursions.

At this point Karen notes how Chris’s traveling marked a significant change in their life patterns as friends, “Well, that was, you know that’s interesting when you’re, at least when you’re talking about friendship because, up until then, basically you and I had been running along, ahem, [clears throat] in similar sort of, yeah

Chris: parallel at least

Karen: grooves. And at that point, we stopped running in similar grooves

Chris: Right.

Karen: because I in the meantime had hooked myself up into the Prospect Harbor School. And was beginning to count the number of years of service that

Chris: Right.

Karen: I had

Chris: Ah yes

Karen: And was, you know, plodding faithfully forward towards retirement. And, not always liking it. And then I got this summer job

Chris: Right.

Karen: down at the pool which I've done for eighteen years now. Which was

Chris: Um hm.

Karen: more plodding and more being in a rut and . . .

Chris: and more being in Prospect Harbor.

Karen: More being in Prospect Harbor. And my mother had come to live with me, which, eh ahem, [clears throat rhetorically] you know, added another dimension to responsibilities that I had here. And so the way we ended up was I was plugged in, and you were basically plugged out. [chuckles]

Chris: [chuckling too] I was plugged in, seasonally.

Karen: Yeah, Chris was running; she was running back and forth between summer

Chris: Back . . .

Karen: [phone rings] and winter . . .

Chris: and Florida and . . . [Taping is interrupted.]

Qualified by chuckling, Karen characterizes herself as “plugged in” and Chris as “plugged out” of life in Maine. Chris, also chuckling, modifies this depiction of herself in Karen’s story, stating she was “plugged in, seasonally,” which Karen then describes as “running back and forth.” Granting the good humor of this friendship, contrasting moral visions inform the divergent patterns of these friends’ lives at this point in their story. Chris pursues pleasure freely; Karen embraces responsibilities faithfully. After answering the phone, Karen summarizes her perceptions of how removed the friends became from each other’s worldview due to their contrasting lifestyles—to the point of having no “real empathy.” At the same time Karen suggests that the spaces and differences separating them did not prevent them from talking with each other. She recalls, “And I, I didn’t understand that, and Chris didn’t understand what I was doing, and neither of us had

any real empathy for the other one's point of view. But it didn't make any difference, in terms of friendship, because we kept on talking about the things that troubled us."

At this point in the dialogue about lifestyles embodied in their co-told narrative of friendship, Karen tells a story about an incident involving one of Chris's children. The event occurred while Chris "went someplace in the winter" and her daughter stayed with Karen. It is the first time she has ever told Chris the story. Although I will not divulge any details here, this vignette could be heard as a dialogical gambit by Karen and a possible indictment of Chris's lifestyle and parenting choices in the past. Chris gracefully sidesteps the tacit invitation to justify herself or respond with stories about past parenting in their talk, remarking, "Why that was another story." She brings matters crisply to the present observing, "My kids are wonderful." Then she explicitly, if somewhat haltingly, acknowledges where Karen seemed to be taking their own story before this digression:

Chris: Right, anyway, um, but I remember uh going, let's see now, oh yea, then uh, that's true what Karen said, we still had, we had lots to talk about even though we were on different tracks, and we always could, regale each other with both the good and the funny things and the bad things, and the things that blew us away, and made us depressed, and all that, and uh, and

Karen: um hmm [slightly laughing]

Chris: so that was a big help always, still is.

❖ SHARING STORIES OF DIVORCES AND TRAVELING TOGETHER

A paired exchange of divorce stories follows. On Chris's part, she had to have a hip replaced several years after her separation from her second husband. In a bittersweet sequence of actions she learned that he had generously kept her on his medical insurance all this time because she "had never dreamed of having insurance." But he also never visited her in the hospital. While she recuperated at her daughter's home and made plans to work in Florida the next winter, she received a "little missive" that he had initiated divorce proceedings. She concludes, "Well anyway. This was another chapter. And it was horrendous [laughs] terrible. Anyway, we won't go into that. But um, I seemed to have a very hard time with this divorce, whereas I hadn't with my first

divorce. Um but emotionally, and it took me very many years to really be through with it, I mean really a lot of years [laughing]. And then Karen stood by me.”

Karen responds, “Well of course at the same, not at the same time, but in similar vein, my missive was, my missive appeared upon my pillow on July 8th of whatever year that was, saying you know I can no longer [laughs], “I can no longer

Chris: [laughs]

Karen: live without Leanne. Do not try to find me.”

Chris: I, I remember that day!

Karen: Remember that? Yeah.

Chris: My God, between the shower and the . . .

Karen: Holy smokes. So of course I immediately popped onto the telephone and spent hundreds of dollars trying to find him, which I did in fact do. But, uh, [slight laugh] hmph Chris was there, listening to me on my diatribes. I was, I knew, oh, years before that that we should be divorced, and

Chris: Right.

Karen: I didn’t want to do it myself, because, you know, I had done it once.

Chris: That’s right. It’s painful.

Karen: and I figured you know I’m not going to try to hold marriages together for the sake of the kids.

Chris: That’s right.

Karen: So what was hurt, my pride was hurt.

Chris: Yeah.

Karen: But that didn’t mean I talked any the less now did it? [laughs]

Chris: Well no, but you had a, a lot of anger too, which was the thing

Karen: Oh yeah, I still have a lot of that.

Chris: I know you do. I know you do.

Karen: I . . . The man is an asshole.

Chris: [laughs]

Karen: Forgive my language.

Chris: [laughing] That's alright. It's free Karen; the air is free.
[laughs]

Karen: The air? Oh whatever. Um, bump up the volume.

Chris: Yeah, well right, well it was a whole bunch, about different circumstances, but anyway it was the same kind of a big jolt.

Karen: Big jolts, right?

Chris: Big jolts.

Karen: And then the big jolts stopped.

Chris: Uh huh. Well?

Karen: Don't you think? I'm not talking about kid jolts.

Chris: No.

Karen: No kid jolts is a whole other story.

Chris: Right, can't get into that.

The women are negotiating the meaning of their divorces. In doing so, they also review, justify, vent, and support each other's past decisions. One witnesses that they still speak together about emerging concerns in the ways they narrate themselves as having spoken together in the past. They also agree that they won't discuss "kid jolts." As proposed earlier by Chris, Karen agrees they are "a whole other story."

At this point the women address how Karen became interested in Chris's "track"—"because I got pretty damn bored with my own track." Karen states laughingly, "All I wanted by this time was to get out!" To which Chris replies, "So then I jumped in cause I said, 'I know how you can get out. I know, I know, I know!'" The friends begin making choices together that find them traveling extensively. Karen goes on an exchange teaching program to California, where Chris visits her twice. The women then relate a sequence of travels and temporary jobs throughout the western United States. With obvious delight they recall visits to the Grand Canyon, Arizona, Navajo country, the Painted Desert, the Petrified Forest, Oak Creek Canyon, Utah, and Zion that demonstrate their enjoyment of traveling together. Several minutes are devoted to the mutual pleasure of reminiscing about this period in their friendship. Yet in narrating their travels, they also describe incidents revealing starkly different preferences: Chris loves heat, Karen cold; Karen smokes, Chris despises smoking; Karen loves and Chris hates shopping.

For the most part, these differences are narrated as handled well throughout their travels. Even so, two incidents stand out. The first is a minor altercation that occurred in Las Vegas. They describe together their contrasting reactions to being assigned a hotel room that had a broken air conditioner. It seems a minor tiff that they laugh about later. However, the second incident is one Karen wants to discuss “before this thing ends” [meaning the recording session]. She puts her cards on the table:

Karen: But I’ll tell you what I haven’t forgotten; I have not forgotten Harlingen, Texas.

Chris: Alright we had another disagreement.

Karen: We have never talked about Harlingen, Texas.

Chris: No we should talk about that, right.

Karen: This is brand new tape. (Heh heh heh)

Chris: This is real; this is uncharted territory.

Karen: Chris, this is the year when I’m doing the Southwest, right. I’d retired.

Chris: Right.

Karen: and Chris is still pursuing “back to the sun in the wintertime,” and she had never been to south Texas,

Chris: Right.

Karen: the Rio Grande Valley, so she went there.

Chris: Right.

Karen: And I had gone to Alamogordo, New Mexico, and had spent the month of November quite happily in Alamogordo, which was too cold for Chris. We had talked about, you know, getting together here, getting together there. And I think that we were planning to do Christmas together anyway.

Chris: Yeah, but we should say that our thermostats are diametrically opposed.

Karen: They are; they are; they are . . .

Chris: Karen likes coolish, sunny but coolish; I like tropical, and sunny.

Karen: Yeah and I get very uncomfortable in tropical.

Chris: Right, so we knew that, but . . .

Karen: We knew that but . . .

Chris: But.

Karen: So then, Chris had an accident in her truck, and she totaled the truck . . .

Chris: [gasp] laugh]

Karen: and she [laughing a little], there she was in Harlingen, Texas

Chris: Harlingen, right

Karen: with no wheels, no insurance, and no money

Chris: Heh, huh. Right.

Karen: And she called me, or I called her, some, somehow

Chris: I did have insurance for the other car, but not for mine . . .

Karen: not for your own

Chris: Right.

Karen: The fat point is you were stuck . . .

Chris: I was there.

Karen: And I, like this conquering hero . . .

Chris: [laughs] while curious

Karen: decided that I would ride to her rescue.

Chris: Right.

Karen: So I suggested that she find us an apartment . . . then she

Chris: Well, one little thing was that before uh the accident, we had talked about we were gonna rendezvous someplace . . .

Karen: Um hm

Chris: in a warmer climate

Karen: Yeah.

Chris: but we weren't, we hadn't determined where or when at that

Karen: where or when

Chris: point.

Karen: I think we were thinking about Christmas weren't we?

Chris: Were we? I don't remember now. But it doesn't matter. Whatever, but any way it was the point anyway.

Karen: So, here we are; Chris finds the apartment . . .

Chris: Right.

Karen: which is on the second floor

Chris: Right.

Karen: And a perfectly pleasant apartment

Chris: But it was a good apartment, yes it was.

Karen: It had, you know, two bedrooms . . . and it's a damn good thing it would turn out.

Chris: Bear in mind that I had to find this without a car, and with my landlady telling me I couldn't use her phone. [gasping laugh]

Karen: Yeah, it was a job.

Chris: Heh heh, and walking on one crutch . . .

Karen: It was a job.

Chris: And anyways, anyway we had this apartment.

Karen: We had this apartment, and the, because of the landlady, I guess, Chris after a lifetime of putting up with me, had suddenly become allergic to smoke. And so she laid down the law that I could only smoke in my bedroom, which pissed me off.

Chris: No I didn't lay, we talked about it on the phone, I didn't lay down that law, I, I, about the little porch, the outdoors and the open windows and door [The tape recorder stops.]

These women have beautifully co-authored the exposition, setting the stage to revisit through co-narration their "disagreement" that occurred in Harlingen, Texas. It promises to be a true dialogue of their respective narratives pursued for the first time in these moments of taping. We can witness their thoughtful listening, qualified encouragement of each other, the way they agree about certain matters and "stand their ground" concerning others, all the while allowing the other woman to happen to her in dialogically rendering the frame for

this tale (Stewart & Zediker, 2000). Karen informs their electronically mediated and time-delayed audience, namely me, "This is brand new, tape." And Chris certifies, "This is real; this is uncharted territory."

We are offered tacitly opposing sketches of the characters and situation that are consistent with other moments of this conversation. As narrated by Karen, Chris, ever shunning the cold, does not join her in a city in New Mexico "too cold for Chris." According to Karen, Chris is still pursuing "back to the sun in the wintertime," has totaled her truck, and is "stuck" in Harlingen "with no wheels, no insurance, and no money." Ever responsible, Karen "decided I would ride to her rescue," only to discover that Chris had found a "second floor" apartment and had "laid down the law that I could only smoke in my bedroom, which pissed me off."

While agreeing on several points, Chris's co-narration contests or qualifies several points of Karen's scene setting and characterization. Chris finds it important to register that "our thermostats are diametrically opposed," that she did have insurance covering the other car though not her own, that she was simply "there," not "stuck," and that Karen was as "curious" as she was heroic in coming to Harlingen. In Chris's story, she finds "a good apartment" without a car or telephone and "walking on one crutch." She maintains they discussed the smoking policy on the phone and that "she didn't lay down that law."

As fate would have it, the tape recorder stops shortly after this point at the end of the cassette's first side. The friends' exchanges on the second side of the tape lead me to believe they actually discussed this incident further while they prepared dinner and the tape was not running. I am left wondering about what happened between these two friends at Harlingen, Texas. How did their contrasting narratives of that time play out in their dialogue? Did they air and reconcile their differences through the dialogue of their narratives that afternoon? Did they decide to limit their recorded talk about it? If so, how did they make this decision? What would this discourse further reveal about their friendship's communicative practices if I could have heard it? I comfort myself that I am fortunate to have been able to listen to the dialogue and narratives that they performed on tape and shared with me.

❖ SIDE TWO OF THE TAPE—CONVERSING ABOUT PETS AND POLICIES

Karen: a proper break. [laughs] We [coughs] we've just managed to amicably cook and share uh rice pilaf, Spanish style, and peas, and what are these Chris? These good things?

Chris: They're garden vegetable patties of some sort, produced by the green, Jolly Green Giant [laughing] people [laugh].

Karen: [laughs too] We didn't fight even once while we . . .

Chris: No, no we didn't.

Karen: while we were cooking these things.

Chris: No we were quite happy. [laughs]

Karen: Um hm. [laughs]

Chris: And sounds of eating now, and chewing

Karen: Um hm.

Chris: Talking with mouth full.

Karen: We're sure you're dying to listen to this part.

Chris: Umm. [agreement]

[sounds of silverware being used and glasses]

The friends' discourse on the second side of the tape differs markedly in one important respect from the first side. On the cassette's first side, they primarily address in the present stories of their past from their mutual if differing standpoints of "having followed" the narratives (Mink, 1970). It seems, however, that the "brand new" and "uncharted" discussion of the events in Harlingen that presumably occurred during the break in taping repositioned their talk to focus on concerns actually arising in the present. Thus, a strong "sense of the middle" (Kepnes, 1992) characterizes the women's dialogue on this side of the tape—simultaneously co-telling and following life as it unfolds in the present as an emerging dialogue and narrative adventure.

Prompted by a phone call by one of Karen's children, at this point in the tape Karen and Chris have been talking about their relationships with their adult children, their children's relationships with each other, and the difficulties of coordinating family get-togethers during the current summer.

Karen: [to her cat] Are you a nice kitty? Are you a nice kitty?

Chris: [almost to herself] Anyway, I decided not, decided not to think about it, 'cause whatever will happen, will happen.

Karen: [to her cat] Okay, check it all out. Put your nose right on it. See, there's nothing there that you want. Nothing.

- Chris:* Tell you what I'm getting into more lately is, [pause] not doing anything . . .
- Karen:* [chuckles in a low-pitched, almost encouraging way]
- Chris:* [laughs briefly]
- Karen:* [chuckles in the same cadence as before, yet higher pitched]
- Chris:* about, not feeling that I have to make things, I have to somehow help things along.
- Karen:* Um hm.
- Chris:* I've just; I've gotten to the point where I'll, you know, I sort of whipped myself into a frenzy when I was there, that bad week that last week that I was there, and I was so depressed, getting the house ready, that somebody might come, that some friend might come, or Loretta might come, or some unknown person might come, and, and I went around sweeping and . . .
- Karen:* My God Chris.
- Chris:* dusting . . .
- Karen:* That *is* depressing.
- Chris:* And, I wanted to have the house look nice and then I, I kinda got a hold of myself and I thought—
- Karen:* Hahahaha [rapid high-pitched laugh]
- Chris:* You know!?
- Karen:* Yeah.
- Chris:* Really here! Um. You know, I don't even *know* if anybody's coming, and, and, and it's beautiful weather, and you know I don't want to be doing this. And I got sort of mad at myself and mad at the house, and, and so since then I've sort of got this idea like, whatever happens, you know, then Julie started in about maybe cousin Alice coming from Georgia, and when could I get her out there, and I said, "Julie, I can't do anything about, given the information that I have, I can't do anything about it, I uh, I'm glad for you to stay there. For Alice to stay there, whoever comes, that's good. But I can't make any more efforts over it; I've just had a summer of planning for things that didn't happen and getting ready for things that didn't happen, and I can't do, and I don't want to do that anymore."

Karen: Mmm.

Chris: I mean I didn't say it in that way to her; but that's the way I feel, basically. I'm just gonna look after what I have to do for myself and for my cat.

Karen: Yeah.

Chris: And keep myself there. And if they fall into place, good; if they don't, too bad, you know?

Karen: Yeah.

It may seem odd to begin this section of the conversation with Karen speaking to her cat. But talking about pets and talking to Karen's cat are integral moments of the later part of this visit. At various points in the conversation, talking to the cat seems to provide a breather in their conversation, which often allows a new topic to emerge. For example, immediately prior to this passage the women had been discussing some of the problems involved when their families would converge on their homes during the upcoming Labor Day weekend. Karen's talk to the cat transitions into a more general discussion of doing less for company.

Listening to this passage, I want to register the significance of laughter apparent throughout the friends' dialogue and my challenges in re-presenting this discourse to readers. Laughter is a vital part of their interaction—there are low, almost mocking chortles; metered laughs, like Karen's in the previous excerpt, that increase in pitch and seemingly urge the other woman to continue and to feel good about what she is saying; wheezy, surprised laughs that turn into coughs and then more laughter; wary, questioning laughs that sound unsure where the talk is turning and at whose expense. Laughter adds gusto and a risky, joyful timbre to their talk. In its ambiguity and teetering emotions, it sounds from the depths of a robust, longstanding connection. As Bakhtin usefully worried, how do we render in words the singularity of such intonation at the heart of communicating in relationships (Todorov, 1984)?

Of course, multiple voices also intersect as an "internal dialogue" as these friends speak (Bakhtin, 1981). Note, for example, how Chris quotes her own utterances to her daughter, Julie, in her talk with Karen. I find intriguing Chris's admission that the version spoken here is an altered one. In this reenactment, Chris seems to dramatize for her friend what she really felt (or is now experiencing that she felt) in addressing Julie. This quotation of herself embedded in her talk with

Karen allows Chris to speak more candidly in relation to her daughter than she did in the actual circumstances. Further, Chris appears to be rehearsing a more assertive identity and position on family visitors through this rendering of herself to Karen. On her part, Karen responds throughout in actively confirming ways. Their dialogue continues.

Chris: I mean it was, I just got burned out when I tried to get Mary out, that was one thing with Mary, you know I felt like I was under the gun the whole time!

Karen: Well . . .

Chris: I had to try to get out and, you know, worked up a gigantic phone bill. Both of us tryin' to make connections and tryin' to go. Finally, I just said, "Well, you know, somebody up there is telling us the word is no—Hmhmhmhm [chuckles quietly, rising slightly in pitch]

Karen: Hm [laughs briefly]

Chris: —and I'm willing to listen to that." Hmha, and Mary really wasn't, 'cause of course she wanted to go so bad. And I didn't blame her, I understood exactly how she felt and said, "There's gotta be a way." Um. I threw in the towel first because over the years I've learned that when it comes up no, seven or eight times that you better listen. Is that what it is, what the answer is is NO? [laughs]

Karen: Yeah.

Chris: No way.

Karen: Yeah.

Chris: And it just kinda, and I just like blew a gasket I guess, and just thought, "I can't go through this anymore; [quietly] I don't do this anymore. I don't."

Karen: [big sigh] I don't know, I can't get ready for things; I, I don't, it's been a long time since I've been willing to get ready for things.

Chris: Really?

Karen: No.

Chris: I've started, this has been quite sudden with me, 'cause usually that's what I spend half my life, getting ready for things, and see—

Karen: I mean for people—

Chris: No, I do too, yeah!

Karen: visitors, you know, coming to this house. [Walks into the kitchen] Hey, they take it as they find it.

Chris: Oh I, well . . .

Karen: And if they don't like it, I can show them where the door is. [She's running water, doing something in the sink.]

Chris: Right. Well, I guess it wasn't so much the house, it was uh I was upset about everything on the island anyway, and then—

Karen: Yeah well you deserved to be.

Chris: And that was another feature of it that [long pause] I just . . .

Karen: Here, look out the door [talking to the cat].

Chris: [laughs] [to the cat] Look at the rain.

Karen: [to the cat] Yeah right, it's like getting your playpen.

Chris: Hahahahun.

Karen: [to the cat] Do something besides whine at me; what's the matter with you? Ho God!

Chris: Ha ha ha, I think he probably resents this other person here.

Karen: No she doesn't, it's just, it's a, it's a need for attention, I don't know, I don't—

Chris: Yeah but if she maybe doesn't have your full attention or something. Are we still on this thing here? [referring to the tape recorder]

Karen: Yeah.

Chris: Oh jeez me, why don't we, we've got to talk about, I've got—

Karen: We're supposed to be talking about friendship, but—

Chris: We got Harlingen right.

Karen: Harlingen, but . . .

I hear a variety of things transpiring during this excerpt. Some of the understated drama of their conversation is nicely displayed. Chris is still talking about the effort involved in receiving visitors at her

island summer home. With vigorous phrases she recounts her burnout, feeling “under the gun” and working up a “gigantic phone bill” in trying to arrange Mary’s visit. Finally, she quotes herself as citing “somebody up there” as intervening in this mythic quest and the other woman’s reluctance to accept a negative answer. Chris characterizes the episode as blowing a gasket for her and meditatively quotes her immediate thoughts to Karen, “I can’t go through this anymore.” At first, it sounds like a conclusion she reached in her mind at that time. However, when she repeats it quietly, “I don’t do this anymore. I don’t,” it sounds like she is again contemplating a new personal policy aloud to Karen, rather than reporting on her reactions in the past. Chris’s present expression of these thoughts is quite pensive yet conclusive in tone.

Beginning with a large sigh, Karen echoes her frustration about the time involved with “getting ready for things” for visitors to her home, and observes spunkily that “Hey, they take it as they find it,” or are shown the door. She emphatically endorses Chris’s distress about recent events at the island, stating explicitly, “Yeah, well you deserved to be.” In short, it appears they have had a fairly thoughtful discussion about their attitudes toward preparing for company. However, when Chris seems to continue this topic, Karen responds to her cat’s meowing to go outside. Both friends laughingly tease the cat about the rainy conditions, subtly establish its sex, and critique its apparent need for Karen’s “full attention.” The cat has occasioned comic relief and perhaps a new topic of conversation.

Interestingly, at this point Chris asks whether they are still being taped. Her surprised, somewhat flustered reaction to Karen’s affirmative answer intrigues me as the would-be eavesdropper embodied by the machine. It appears that she had forgotten their conversation is being recorded, which supports my perceptions of the mostly uninhibited, authentic qualities of their interaction. Karen reminds her they are “supposed to be talking about friendship.” Chris observes, “We got Harlingen right,” referring again to their discussion during the break of their quarrel while traveling revealed toward the end of the tape’s first side.

❖ PERFORMING A DIALOGUE OF NARRATIVES ABOUT CONJUNCTIVE FREEDOMS

In the next section of their conversation, Chris initiates a poignant dialogue about Karen’s unavailability and minimal communication the

previous winter. They address a predicament in their friendship that I consider a significant dialectical tension facing close friends—the dialectic of the freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent (Rawlins, 1983b, 1992). I have stated, “Time apart can be interpreted either as an assertion of friends’ faith in their bond or the possible beginning of a new period of separateness that may jeopardize the friendship. During the period of separation, there is really no way of telling exactly which is the case, except by renewing contact” (1983b, p. 261). Imagine how intrigued I was to stumble on these two friends explicitly considering the lived dynamics of this dialectical principle when Chris pointedly raises them as a concern.

Chris: Well the other thing, I’ve got to say this before we get back into that [laughs] Harlingen [laughingly said] who-knows-what,

Karen: [laughs with Chris]

Chris: but I have to tell you now. Last winter, after, after last fall [long pause] you were going to Portland for the, for the first time— [serious tone]

Karen: Yeah.

Chris: and . . . getting an apartment, all that stuff. And we, I went down to see you once. [slow, measured pace and tone]

Karen: Right. [quickly inserted]

Chris: And then um, we had a few, I don’t know how you pronounce it, desultory?

Karen: Desultory.

Chris: Letters. [brief laugh]

Karen: Um hm.

Chris: [laughs] missives floating back and forth.

Karen: I get the feeling here that there’s something between us? [said with a quizzical expectant laugh]

Chris: Then . . . a little longer silences and longer silences.

Karen: Yeah.

Chris: And I got quite upset.

Karen: I know; it was my fault. [quickly interjected]

Chris: Well, I'm not saying fault, but the thing is Karen that I decided that the crux of it was that [puts food in her mouth] we're friends of this long and good standing, [pause] and I didn't know what the *hell* was going on. I didn't know if you were dead or alive.

Karen: I was pretty near dead.

Chris: Or in the hospital, or what. But I had no way of, I mean except to call your son and say, you know, "Is your mother okay?"

Karen: Did you?

Chris: No. I didn't.

Karen: Oh. Yeah well; I don't know whether he could've answered you or not.

The above excerpt opens with a distinctive mix of laughter and deliberately paced interaction, momentarily achieving a questioning, ambivalent atmosphere. After laughing about Harlingen, Chris clearly wants to talk with Karen about their, but mainly Karen's, actions the previous winter. Chris initiates the topic of their gradually losing contact in a markedly measured sequence of turns, even dwelling on the correct pronunciation of "desultory" in recalling their letters. Karen responds to each of these speaking turns promptly and tersely, which functions to magnify their segmented quality. After Chris seems to laugh a little nervously, Karen senses "that there's something between us?" registering this questioning observation with a watchful laugh. Chris then asserts that the "little longer and longer silences" made her "quite upset," and Karen instantly replies, "I know; it was my fault."

In my opinion, less than ideal contact is a condition many adult friends face (Rawlins, 1994). Such separation is primarily a relationally negotiated pattern that friends may handle in multiple ways, ranging from ignoring to explicitly addressing the issue. Evidently, Chris cares enough about the matter to raise it with Karen but is not interested in assigning blame or "fault." It is a rather sophisticated communicative challenge for her to bring up this concern without hurting or angering Karen, which may be the reason for her tentative approach. Once the issue is on the table, Chris immediately clarifies that "the crux of it was we're friends of this long and good standing," that she was uninformed, and that her worries centered on her friend's well-being. In my judgment, a vexing past situation in this friendship has been opened sensitively for their present dialogue as friends.

Yet, as someone who has listened to this conversation many times, I read these and the next few lines as initial expressions of some deep-seated themes in their ensuing dialogue. Specifically, Chris states, "I didn't know if you were dead or alive," to which Karen replies, "I was pretty near dead." Then Chris observes that the only way she felt she could learn if Karen was okay would be to call her son. Karen immediately asks if she did; Chris says no; and Karen states, "Yeah well; I don't know whether he could've answered you or not." Here is my interpretation of these lines: Chris worried about Karen because she cares for her and can be anxious about her health. Even so, Chris respects Karen's privacy and freedom within their friendship. She recognizes that an unobtrusive way to inquire about Karen would be through Karen's son, though Chris chose not to do so. Karen acknowledges the legitimacy of Chris's concerns when she says she was "pretty near dead," however literally the expression is meant. Then, Karen momentarily puts Chris on the spot and seemingly tests her sincerity by verifying whether she did contact Karen's son, then immediately excuses Chris by doubting whether he could have answered Chris. Karen's wry expression of this last statement could imply a variety of meanings: He might not know because he was not in touch with his mother either; he was in touch with his mother, but neither he nor she knew for sure whether she was "okay"; he knew his mother was not okay but would be hesitant to convey that to Chris. Regardless, it seems that Karen confirms the validity of Chris's worries last winter as well as Chris's reluctance to contact Karen directly or indirectly.

Chris: Well the thing was, I thought [long pause] and then finally, I guess it was Julie, my daughter, said, something about that you were hav—, were in one of your stages where you didn't wanta communicate, you were withdrawing and whatever, whatever.

Karen: Yeah, I was.

Chris: And I thought, "Well that's okay; everybody has these times when they feel this way." But I feel like you should *alert* people that *care* about you [laughs] to the fact that this is what is goin' on—

Karen: [laughs] Yeah . . .

Chris: "I'm going into my cave. See ya in the spring," or whatever. Or "I don't wish to have anything, writing or any communications for a while. Not to worry. Adios. Bye to everybody, Hasta la vista or whatever."

Karen: Yeah.

Chris: Or something, because I [pause], I [pause], I . . .

Karen: You were worried.

Chris: It was very hard on me to not know and then to hear third hand, I mean maybe I, I didn't take the responsibility of following it up or making any, after a couple, writing a couple of times; but I felt like it would be a help to me to know that, not to know that you were having a depressed, hard time, but to know that you, you didn't want to be bothered with having to write or correspond, or to talk on the phone or see anyone, or whatever it was. But even a, a postcard to say this, or to say, you know, "Leave me alone" [laughs] or whatever.

Karen: [laughs in a quiet, understanding way]

Chris: And, or whatever you were thinking, [pause] would have been a help to me, because I find, I felt like you know maybe we're never gonna talk again, maybe we'll never see each other. I didn't know what exactly what was going on. And I—

Karen: Well I didn't know what was going on either.

Chris: No, I know you didn't.

At this point Chris recalls thinking, and her daughter confirming, that perhaps Karen merely wanted to withdraw from social contact for awhile. After Karen agrees, Chris quotes her thoughts to herself at the time that such feelings are commonplace and "okay." Even so, she believes that Karen "should alert people that care about you to the fact that this is going on . . ." They both laugh at this rather paradoxical recommendation to communicate to significant others that she does not intend to communicate with them. Chris rehearses two voices for Karen here: a humorous one that trades on a hibernation metaphor, and then a more serious, explicit statement with Spanish flourishes at the end that seem to add a comical flavor. As Karen affirms this idea, however, Chris surrenders her comic tone and makes the frank request, "Or something," haltingly trying to offer her reasons, "I [pause], I [pause], I . . .," which Karen completes for her, "You were worried." In short, Karen again recognizes the emotional basis of Chris's concerns and legitimates Chris's suggested policy for communicating social withdrawal.

Chris further elaborates her anxieties about not knowing about Karen and about learning of her through others, acknowledging that

she was partly responsible for losing contact by not following up on her early letters. Nonetheless, she repeats her desire to be informed when Karen “didn’t want to be bothered with having to write or correspond, or to talk on the phone or see anyone, or whatever it was.” The friends laugh together at the suggestion that Chris would prefer “even a, a postcard” or a brusque, “Leave me alone” to ambiguous silence. Chris remarks that last winter she was not sure if they would ever talk or visit again, that she “didn’t know exactly what was going on.” Once again, Karen responds, “Well I didn’t know what was going on either,” implying that her being on the “sending” side of her own silence was possibly as frustrating and confusing as being on the “receiving” side. Chris immediately confirms Karen’s reflection, saying, “No I know you didn’t.”

Chris: But the thing is. [pause] However much you want to struggle through things on your own, and I know that every now and then we have to do this on a lot of things, [pause] but I, I would just hope that you could say, “I need to be by myself, I need to be incommunicado;” or whatever. However you phrased it. And then I’d say, “Oh yeah. Well that’s good. I know that. That’s what’s happening to Karen now; and that whatever it entails I don’t know, but I know that that’s the way, that’s her pleasure right now to do this time, to frame it out this way.” Now I can accept that, I have always accepted everything else that—

Karen: [laughing sardonically] Ha heh “She’s thrown my way.”

Chris: No, I mean between us, both of us, back and forth have accepted pretty much, may have been some bumpy spots and all, but we could live with it, and we could go on. And then, and so I felt that, well one of the worst things anybody can do to *me* is from, prior history, is to not let me know what the hell is going on.

Karen: Yeah, I can understand why you would feel that way.

Chris: That is the worst thing that could, if, I don’t care, I can cope, if I (heh heh) . . .

Karen: I’ll just get this.

Chris: [chuckles] I’m spitting rice on the floor.

Karen: (hahahaha) [laughs quietly in a little bit of a high pitched titter]

Chris: Um, and then you know since my father's illness and death and all when I wasn't told, and I've always had that feeling that [long pause] if you lay it on me I can somehow get a handle on it, I can work at least on doing that. If I don't know, and if it's secret and I'm not supposed to be told anything, that is devastating . . . to me. So there. [The passage beginning with, "if you lay it on me" is quite emotional in tone and then gradually tapers back into a more ordinary conversational one.]

Again Chris acknowledges Karen's and most persons' need to "struggle through things" independently while also repeating her hope that Karen will inform others when she feels that way. Then Chris rehearses what she would say to herself upon learning "That's what's happening to Karen now." These statements clearly endorse Karen's actions. Chris comments on her ability to accept Karen's needs to be alone, as well as "everything else that— . . ." As Chris searches for words, Karen concludes the sentence in a sarcastically laughing manner, "Ha heh 'She's thrown my way.'"

This can be heard as a rather complex occurrence in their conversation. Basically, Karen ventriloquizes Chris's voice here in nuanced yet revealing ways. First, by using the third person ("She's" instead of "You've thrown my way."), Karen grammatically converts the implied trajectory of the sentence to resemble Chris's previous statements *about* Karen in the past, rather than something she is *now* saying *to* Karen. Through this formulation Karen seems to suggest subtly that Chris is reluctant to address her directly. Second, using the word "thrown" rather than the diplomatic wording Chris has previously employed colors Chris's statement as recalling unpleasant surprises. Karen's version changes Chris's statement from one about acceptance into one of judgment. For Karen to have Chris say, "I have always accepted everything else she's thrown my way," in a sardonic tone significantly shapes the spirit and implied meaning of Chris's unfinished sentence, in my opinion. In Karen's version Chris is not accepting Karen; she is judging her, and speaking in the third person objectifies her further.

Chris seems to pick up on Karen's characterization of her, protesting, "No," and proceeds to describe "bumpy spots" occurring in their relationship, "between us," that "both of us, back and forth have accepted pretty much." Yet her initiation of this segment of the conversation does constitute a judgment of Karen's actions last winter. Despite Chris's desire to grant Karen the freedom to be independent, Karen's unannounced, extended silences troubled Chris. Accordingly, Chris restates what earlier in the conversation she, without assigning blame ("saying

fault”), deemed “the crux” of the issue. Using almost identical words as earlier, Chris states, “One of the worst things anybody can do to *me* is from, prior history, is to not let me know what the hell is going on.” Interestingly, she does not emphasize the word “hell” this time, and the entire statement is said in a way that suggests she is repeating an important point she has already made. Realizing its significance Karen says empathically, “Yeah, I can understand why you would feel this way.”

As Chris begins to discuss this “worst thing,” a brief humorous interlude occurs due to her “spitting rice on the floor.” Then we learn that because of the secrecy surrounding her father’s death, Chris feels strongly about not being told things. One of the most emotional passages in this talk is her statement, “If you lay it on me I can somehow get a handle on it, I can work at least on doing that. If I don’t know, and if it’s secret and I’m not supposed to be told anything, that is devastating . . . to me.” With Chris’s personal associations registered, the significance of her feelings about not hearing from Karen is thrust into a new light. The immediate result in the dialogue is that Karen begins to narrate and explain her actions.

Karen: Well, see I wasn’t consciously trying to keep secret; I, I, I certainly was not thinking about anything but myself.

Chris: No,

Karen: Right, you know—

Chris: No.

Karen: I wasn’t thinking about, you know, my effect on you—

Chris: No, of course not

Karen: and I wasn’t thinking about my effect on Sandy either—

Chris: No.

Karen: and I didn’t communicate with her any more than I communicated with you—

Chris: No, it was everybody, and I understand that.

Karen: No and now that it’s later I am ashamed of that, but, at the time I just didn’t want to do anything except, you know, sit in my chair and take my daily Prozac.

Chris: Yeah.

Karen: Which was a disaster. [said with a brief scornful laugh]

Chris: Was it?

Karen: Oh yeah, Christ.

Chris: How long did you take it?

Karen: I took it for about four or five months.

Chris: Really, Kar? [asked in a quiet, deeply concerned voice]

Karen: Yeah. And at the end of it, I was beginning to think, you know, "Hey, why bother?"

Chris: Yeah.

Karen: "Why bother at all?"

Chris: Yeah.

Karen: And at that point I thought, "Why don't you just stop this?"

Chris: Yeah.

Karen: You know so, I just call, I just stopped taking it—

Chris: Yeah.

Karen: and uh, I did call the doctor, and say, "You know, it uh," and left a message on her, I don't know, with her nurse or some damn thing, but I was . . . you know not getting the benefit—

Chris: Was this a medical doctor that had given you this?

Karen: Yeah.

Karen: Yeah. *Chris:* Oh. [simultaneously in quiet harmony]

Karen: Yeah. *Chris:* Hmm. [simultaneously in quiet harmony]

Karen: Yeah.

Karen: [brief mocking laugh] Jean thought I was, what a heart attack waiting to happen, you know and all those lovely things.

Chris: Right.

Karen: I don't know; it was just a bad

Chris: a bad time

Karen: a bad time.

Chris: Oh yeah. Must have been awful for you.

At the beginning of this excerpt, Karen immediately addresses Chris's use of the word "secret," asserting that "trying to keep secret" was never her conscious goal. Secrecy suggests deliberately concealing information or selectively excluding others (Rawlins, 1983a). In contrast, during this period Karen recalls being focused only on herself without considering the "effect" of her seclusion on Chris or Sandy, another close friend of hers. Further, she describes being equally uncommunicative with both women. After responding supportively to virtually every point Karen makes here, Chris acknowledges the blanket nature of Karen's retreat, saying, "No, it was everybody, I understand that." Removed in time, Karen admits being "ashamed" of seemingly abandoning her friends but now adds that her self-absorption included a disastrous drug prescription.

As she listens to her friend, Chris proceeds to ask brief, interested questions and to give positive minimal responses (Maltz & Borker, 1982) that may facilitate Karen recounting this lamentable period lasting "four or five months." Karen reenacts her thoughts "at the end of it" to Chris when she concluded to herself, "Why don't you just stop this?" Karen reports, "I just stopped taking it," and narrates leaving a message for her doctor to that effect. Sounding critically concerned, Chris asks, "Was this a medical doctor that had given you this?"

At this point a brief exchange occurs that I want to describe in detail because it illustrates the rhythm and musicality of these friends' conversation and my extreme limitations in trying to render it for readers. As my transcription above tries to depict, here's what happens: After Chris asks this question, Karen says, "Yeah," then in a gentle manner repeats, "Yeah," this time accompanied by Chris saying "Oh" in soft, higher pitched harmony, followed immediately in the same cadence with Karen saying "Yeah" again, this time with Chris simultaneously voicing "Hmm" in the same dulcet harmony; and then Karen utters one last solo "Yeah." It is a musical coda of sorts for the story just told, followed by Karen's piqued observation that "Jean thought I was a heart attack waiting to happen; you know, and all those lovely things." Then ensues an interaction confirming the negative nature of this period, which both friends concur was "a bad time" for Karen. And Chris observes compassionately, "Must have been awful for you."

Karen: And I didn't, you know, the only people that I knew were like Michael and Tina and the kids.

Chris: Right.

Karen: And that was all I wanted to know.

- Chris:* That was all you could do—
- Karen:* If they had anybody over for dinner, you could be damn sure I wasn't there.
- Chris:* Right. [walks into kitchen] No, I know how you can't deal with anybody, and don't want to. [from another part of the room] I'm gonna have some more rice, now.
- Karen:* So . . .
- Chris:* I don't know how I could still be hungry, but I am . . . Well—
- Karen:* Chris, I apologize. I apologize, and I—
- Chris:* No, I, it's not a thing for an apology, I'm just saying, in the *future* when the storms come, don't—
- Karen:* I'll do it, Ha ha.
- Chris:* Try to raise the pennant and say, "Storm signals are flying here."
- Karen:* "Storm signals are flying," okay. [said mostly to herself seemingly in rehearsal]
- Chris:* Or some such ilk, and um, and just so I can say, "Okay." And I, I would do the same, I mean—
- Karen:* Ah but you, dear heart, are going to be at sea.
- Chris:* [talking with food in her mouth] Only nineteen days, I mean not for the rest of the winter, [laughing a little] I hope, unless we're blown way off course!
- Karen:* Noo, I, I, I hope I sincerely hope for my sake that this winter will be purposeful,
- Chris:* Yeah.
- Karen:* and maybe even interesting? Nah.
- Chris:* Well why not?
- Karen:* [whispers] That's too much.
- Chris:* You've got all of Portland at your feet! [laughs]

During the above segment, Karen indicates that her sole contacts during this time were her son and his family who live in the immediate vicinity, and only if they did not have dinner guests. Walking into

the kitchen Chris voices her understanding of her friend's desire to avoid people. When Chris returns to the table, Karen tentatively begins, "So . . .," and then calling her friend by name, says quite sincerely, "Chris, I apologize. I apologize, and I—." Karen seems to register her realization that even though Chris now understands and accepts her retreat, she hurt Chris deeply by shutting her out and providing no indication of what she was going through. The friends have returned to "the crux" of their dialogue after considering in depth each woman's story of her experiences of "last winter."

Chris cuts short Karen's statement, once again insisting, "It's not a thing for apology." Instead, Chris wants to establish a forward looking practice in their friendship. Tuning into their shared history living on the coast of Maine, Chris uses nautical terms, "I'm just saying, in the future when the storms come, don't—." Before hearing the rest, Karen laughingly interjects, "I'll do it." Chris continues, "Try to raise the pennant and say, 'Storm signals are flying here,'" which Karen immediately appears to rehearse aloud. Chris states that such a signal will allow her to respond, "Okay," and that she will indicate likewise, should she require solitude.

Having agreed to this procedure, Karen promptly steers their conversation to the fact that soon Chris will literally be "at sea." Chuckling, Chris replies that she will sail for "Only nineteen days" and not the entire winter "unless we're blown way off course!" Karen, in turn, wistfully hopes for a purposeful and interesting winter, to which Chris encouragingly responds. Just beyond this transcript the women begin to analyze together Karen's constraints and opportunities in Portland during the approaching season.

❖ INTERWEAVING NARRATIVES AND DIALOGUE IN THE TALK OF TWO FRIENDS

This talk reminds us what it can mean to converse in a close, long-standing friendship. This chapter addresses only a 90-minute conversation, a fleeting episode in this friendship of 30 years. But perusing this slice of life reveals much about the ebbs and flows of communicating with a close friend. This discourse illustrates the enjoyment of conversing with a long-time friend and for these women in particular, a shared appreciation of the drama of everyday life, its continuous production of comic and tragic events, and the need to make sense of them.

In trying to comprehend their lived experiences together and apart and to situate the choices shaping their lives across times and places,

Chris and Karen tell each other stories. The *narrative activities* of friends described in Chapter 3 are richly illustrated in their conversation. First, the women work to establish their meanings for a range of personal and joint episodes through carefully exploring their stories. As enacted by Karen and Chris, these meanings are active, collaborative, ongoing, and cumulative accomplishments. They frequently are created by the participants from highly nuanced behaviors, prosodic cues, or word choices. These meanings symbolically reproduce mutually recognized events that occurred or are unfolding in real time and concrete settings with genuine consequences for the friends and/or persons they care about.

Second, each woman's voice as a narrator embodies her specific point of view on related events. What particulars of divorces, seasonal changes, jobs, decisions, deaths, and travels are selected for telling by each of these women? Which details matter to her in the stories and why? What subjects does she want to downplay or avoid? How does she recall experiencing narrated episodes? What differences do the occurrences and persons selected for narration make in each woman's life and her experience of their friendship? Each woman seems dedicated to performing her own while also honoring her friend's perspective.

Third, the co-telling of these narratives is a dynamic communicative activity with each woman vividly relating her experiences as well as listening carefully and responsively to her friend. These friends seem to feel free to experiment stylistically and with multiple voices in their talk. Throughout their discourse they quote their own and others' thoughts and statements in colorful and sometimes admittedly fictional ways. Each feels encouraged to narrate and dramatize events in ways that allow her to role-play, rehearse new identities, and explore different characters. Meanwhile, they actively listen to each other, providing frequent verbal and nonverbal responses and asking effective questions. Each is a dedicated witness to her friend's testimonies (Frank, 1995).

Fourth, in recounting their stories together, the women are keen to portray the perceived contexts of their actions and decisions. It is important for their actions to be understood in terms of the circumstances they now believe they were facing then. For example, personal financial situations, treatment by others, and existential outlooks are depicted as facilitating and limiting their options in ways the women must address in their stories. I am fascinated by how their conversation builds on itself, with events, people, periods and places cross-referenced and indexed multiple times as they co-tell the stories of each other's opportunities, choices, and relationships.

Fifth, in a related fashion, the women's stories portray the connected basis of their identities throughout their discourse. Karen and

Chris's communicative relationship with each other is mediated by numerous other relationships—with prior spouses, children, in-laws, friends, co-workers, and employers. The co-telling of their friendship for much of the first side of the tape emphasizes their relationships with prior spouses as especially significant in constructing their past identities. However, in the more present-oriented second side of the tape, relationships with their children and their families provide the salient relational contexts for narrating their identities. As a negative example, I find it intriguing that the two friends collaborate in avoiding past parenting episodes in co-narrating their friendship. Relating events specifically focusing on child-rearing or “kid jolts” is termed “another story” in Chris's words and “a whole other story” in Karen's. While somewhat unavoidable in the overall configurations of their lives at given points, the primary identities as friends they co-narrate here do not emphasize their past parenting-related identities with their children or vis-à-vis each other. Focusing on such parenting practices might invoke pronounced differences that occasion too much judgment and strain the fabric of their connection.

Finally, from its inception, this conversation may be viewed as seeking to understand through stories how the events of their intertwined lives occurred across time. Their talk involves the ongoing narrative punctuation of when important moments of their lives began and what marked their ending or transition to “another chapter,” to use Chris's words. They use stories to characterize sequentially the beginning of their friendship, their respective arrivals “to stay” in Maine, the slow demises and the abrupt endings of their marriages. Meanwhile, they employ stories to describe the configuration of pressures perceived as operating simultaneously for specific events to be understood after the fact from their present vantage point of telling. Thus, these friends co-narrate both sequences and configurations of events to establish together plausible “was and is” selves (Barros, 1998). What aspects of self's and the other's identity do these women want to preserve across time? What aspects should be relegated to the past and laid to rest as a function of unfavorable circumstances? In what ways has each woman changed and stayed the same that constitute a testament to her unique identity as a worthy person and friend?

The ideal *practices of dialogue* discussed in Chapter 3 are also apparent simultaneously as Karen and Chris co-tell the narratives of their friendship. First, to varying degrees throughout their discourse, the two women actively exchange, question, and respond to each other's points of view on incidents and matters of shared concern. The co-narrated prelude to discussing their disagreement at Harlingen, which closed the

tape's first side, is a case in point. Performing the back and forth of dialogue, the women address and revise several details framing the events in question as they begin to tell the tale together. Their co-narration involves contesting and qualifying particulars reflecting their distinctively individuated values and identities. As another example, the question of who came to stay first in Maine is addressed by exchanging contrasting versions of the story in dialogical counterpoint. The precise significance of events and claimed identities is a matter for cross-examination at several points in their conversation, yet often with an eye to preserving each friend's dignity.

Second, these two women communicate obvious respect for each other's personhood throughout their talk. An atmosphere of encouragement shapes much of their dialogue. This ambience is probably due to several communicative practices richly evident in their talk. Many risky disclosures are met with confirming responses. Each woman explicitly recognizes the legitimacy of the other's experience at various points. Concern is expressed when the other's narrative seems to warrant it. Unselfconsciously, they exhibit effort and empathy in trying to recognize and dignify, if not entirely understand, what the other is feeling or saying at that moment.

Third, they devote much of their conversation to acknowledging the historically and relationally accomplished similarities and differences in their identities. A vivid dialogue about their individuated lifestyles and identities is embedded in their co-told narrative about participation in their longstanding friendship. On one hand, they hold in common: similar paths to and a love for Maine, "missives" and divorces from prior spouses, a shared sense of humor, enjoyment of laughter and conversation, and pleasant memories of traveling together. They also share recently admitted stances toward preparing for company. On the other hand, they have different preferences concerning weather and ambient temperature, cigarette smoking, and shopping. Deeper contrasts in moral visions and associated identities seem embodied in their depictions of diverging life "grooves," presenting Chris as a free spirit "plugged out" of life in Maine and Karen as the "plodding" responsible person "plugged in" to life in Maine. The depths of these differences animate more penetrating questioning and more pointed narration between the friends at times. Even so, their apparent agreement not to discuss parenting issues suggests a difference that could make a difference in their relationship. The topic may be too painful and judgmental; discussing it could threaten their friendship.

Fourth, the two women sustain active and mutual involvement over the course of their unfolding conversation, which is a hallmark of

committed dialogue. Accordingly, we witness a range of emotions expressed and acknowledged in their dialogue—from worried self-reflection and engaged questioning to tentative indulgence, from outright anger to warm confirmation and exuberant laughter. In fact, the terrain of their talk is sprinkled with many species of laughter. The two friends converse with attention and feeling. We sense that these women are very much “in the moment” when speaking and listening to each other. They hang on to each other’s words and sighs, responding to nuances as well as to forthright thoughts and feelings. They give each other opportunities to retreat and reflect.

Fifth, reproducing the edifying individuation and participation of hearty friendship, the two women preserve their own convictions while remaining open to the other’s influence. Each represents with integrity her own experiences while opening herself to the other’s insights and concerned observations. Historically, this is apparent in Karen’s account of times when their lives differed so much that there was “no real empathy” between them. Even so, both women acknowledge that their contrasting lifestyles did not prevent conversation nor preclude their desire to hear and consider the other’s point of view. Finally, being the persons they are with the constraints of their circumstances, they acknowledge limits in their abilities to change as a result of their dialogues. Even so, as their closing conversation about communicating desired separation attests, they remain willing to express and consider distinctive positions.

This chapter embodies an overarching *narrative* of this friendship as their dialogical exchanges juxtaposing divergent positions reveal their characters, pivotal events, choices, and consequences as individuals and as friends over the past 30 years. Their apparently negotiated decision to address their quarrel at Harlingen while the tape recorder was turned off contributed to the overall narrative of their friendship embodied in this recorded dialogue. Their coordinated avoidance to address past parenting practices and children (“kid jolts”) involves “another story,” in their words. Consequently, my narrativization of their dialogue involves three sections. The first part focuses on past events starting conventionally with the beginning of their friendship. The Harlingen incident is brought up as “brand new” (Karen) and “uncharted territory” (Chris) at the end of this part. By all indications, the friends discussed the situation in a second, unrecorded part of their discourse while preparing their dinner. The third part occurs on side two of the tape. Their discussion of the contemporary challenges of coordinating visits is prompted by a phone call from one of Karen’s children that interrupts the taping. At this point the friends pursue an extended

dialogue embodying their "sense of the middle" (Kepnes, 1992) and their co-narrated possibilities emerging continuously in the present.

This chapter also presents a *dialogue* composed of differing as well as common viewpoints performed and interrogated through narratives exchanged between the two friends. Different positions are manifest in the back and forth of their individual and co-told stories. Their individuated perspectives also arise in the distinctive points of view each woman performs in co-telling the stories animating this dialogue.

Here enters my interpretation of how they enact two dialectical tensions potentially inspiring engaged dialogue between friends (Rawlins, 1989a, 1992). At various points in their talk, contradictions involving the dialectic of judgment and acceptance emerge. Tensions arise between each woman's confidence that the other will accept her and give her the benefit of the doubt in most instances, and her expectation that deserved judgments will be conveyed. They notably enact this dialectical tension in the last section of their discourse as they deal with the issue of Karen cutting off contact with Chris the previous winter. This matter further turns on the dialectical tension between granting the freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent in close friendship (Rawlins, 1983b). Weaving in and out of critical and accepting discourse, the two women examine in detail through narrated particulars and dialogical counterpoint Chris's legitimate concerns about Karen's seclusion and Karen's understandable need for privacy. Judging together in this way, they establish sensitively a new policy for dealing with such circumstances in the future. Interestingly, it is a paradoxical policy asking each friend to communicate to the other when she is feeling the need not to communicate. The other, in turn, is expected to hear and respect this desire for what it is.

The talk of these women displays the edifying potentials shared by narrative and dialogic activity. Both types of discourse interweave in these two friends' talk to shape each friend's individuated point of view. They do so as invitational discursive activities that welcome, serve, and reflect edifying participation as a primary goal. Both narrative and dialogue, as performed by Karen and Chris, emphasize the creative, ethical, and mutually affirming significance of engaged listening. In facilitating belonging and mutually enriching listening, their dialogue and storytelling seem to constitute ends in themselves, regardless of what they might achieve extrinsically for these friends. These two women enjoy talking together. The robust discourses of dialogues and narratives generate and invoke moral visions for these friends.

Taken together, narrating stories and pursuing dialogues constitute significant discursive activities that involve these women in making

choices as friends. They decide together meanings for their actions in the past, which in turn confirm their present identities as friends and as individuals. Addressing events in the distant and recent past from the vantage point of the present, they compose their shared sense of turning points that matter in experiencing their lives. I argue that such turning points include valued conversations like this one pursued with friends—ones that embody narratives of dialogues and dialogues of narratives. To a significant extent, *making meanings is making choices as friends*. Accomplishing this choice-making together composes significant moments of the connected freedoms living at the heart of friendship.