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Kathryn Frances Hunt

## An Exploration of the Experience of Loss and its Relationship to Counselling Practice

### Abstract

The research approach was qualitative, heuristic (Moustakas, 1990) and ethnographic. I emphasised personal and subjective knowledge as essential components of objectivity (Bridgman, 1950). The interview sample was thought to be experienced in loss. Ethnography was chosen as an approach because it bore a close resemblance to the routine ways in which people make sense of their everyday lives. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995)

The main question was: *What do people do when they experience loss?* The results challenge prevailing medical theories in that we notice that grief can be life long and not necessarily pathological. Grief is idiosyncratic in nature. Books about the theory of grief speak to us although we are aware of them as simplistic and yet not simple enough to hold our experience. We search for models of loss in an attempt to plot ourselves in the process. We may feel wise and realise that all along we have held the key to our own difficulties in the process of loss. The agency and wisdom of the mourner is not acknowledged in medical models of grief. By interacting in the world we work at grief, when watching TV, reading a novel, involved in a love affair, friendship, putting a photograph in a frame or wallet, listening to music, talking, having sex, walking, being silent, accepting a caress, visiting a place.... The list is endless. All activity provides opportunity and location for grief work. The definition of grief work could be broader. The findings suggest that each of us has a functional *grieving self*, which is permanent, contains a cumulative store of pain and is ready when needed. It is located in a timeless dimension of the constantly changing, fluid self, a self that is not just intrapersonal but also located in the interpersonal, physical, spiritual and cultural domain.

This thesis is dedicated to my brothers Stephen (1954-1988) and Michael (1967-2002) both beautiful people with lovely smiles. My life is richer for knowing them.

I would also like to acknowledge the support and patience of my supervisor, Maggie Robson and the love of my friends and family with a special dedication to Geof Alred for his love, advice and support throughout the writing of this thesis. I would also like to thank earlier supervisors who retired during the process, John McGuinness and Peter Cook.

I would like to mention a warm and grateful thank you to all clients who have taught me so much. This work rests heavily on the bedrock of my practice.

An Exploration of the Experience of Loss and its  
Relationship to Counselling Practice

Kathryn Frances Hunt

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Durham

School of Education

2004

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06 DEC 2005



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I declare that none of this material has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

As I embarked on this exploration I looked to a philosopher to illustrate my process of learning. I chose to observe, reflect on and record. Wittgenstein (1953), describes the very nature of philosophical investigation as being compelled to,

*.... 'travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction' he further comments that the remarks he makes in his work are 'a number of sketches of landscapes, which were made in the course of these long involved journeyings'. (p.ix)*

As did Wittgenstein, I felt compelled to travel in such a way to investigate the experience of loss. I too have sketched some landscapes in the course of these long involved journeyings through the experience of my loss and the loss of others. I had a strong desire to travel more and to continue sketching.

*'The same or almost the same points were always being approached from different directions, and new sketches made. Very many of these were badly drawn or uncharacteristic, marked by all the defects of a weak draughtsman. And when they were rejected a number of tolerable ones were left, which now had to be arranged and sometimes cut down, so that if you looked at them you could get a picture of the landscape. Thus this book is only an album.'* (Wittgenstein, 1953, p.ix)

The metaphor of creating an album of sketches is one I was drawn to and comfortable with. I have kept such real albums of sketches in my life and have enjoyed the freedom of expression, the spontaneous roughness of an impression of light, line or colour. I know these sketches have contributed to more polished, carefully considered final pieces of visual art. So, I understand the purpose of this loosening in order to attain a tighter planned and acceptable product. I am also aware of the great beauty in the '5 minute sketch' that captures the essence of an experience in the way that polished work cannot. Therefore I value it all. The gathering of information, the accumulation of data, the millions of words spoken, written, transcribed, read on trains, listened to on a portable cassette player, the scribbled notes and references, the exchange of thoughts and ideas with other interested souls, the visual images arising from art therapy sessions, the images and arrangements and choice of play for children in play therapy sessions, the experience of adults in counselling sessions. A huge pastiche that had to be ordered and structured in a thoughtful and rigorous manner and put into a good enough state to become a communication to my fellow professionals in the field of counselling and play therapy.

The temporal activity of formalising this process by writing required me to describe an inescapable part of my everyday existence. This study has a structure, a lead in, a core (my contribution to the knowledge base) and a lead out. However, there will never be a complete picture. At this point this particular album is full. Hopefully, my life will continue for some time now past the point of finishing and yet I will continue to be involved in the process of exploring the experience of loss in the process of living my life. It was my hunch that this activity is a non-pathological, life-long activity for all.

In the writing of this work my wish is to communicate my findings with others.

Wittgenstein (1953), states that he does not write,

..... *'To spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own'* (p.x)

I feel this way too. I do not lay claim to the truth but only to a truth.

I admire the writer and neuro-psychologist, Oliver Sacks. In his writing he manages to capture what it is to be a unique human being, albeit those struggling with illness and disability, when he describes the lives and stories of his patients. He explores the lives of others within their own idiosyncratic landscapes. My aim was to be able to do something similar in my exploration and gathering of data for this study. I wanted to tell the stories of people from within their own landscapes.

Briefly, Sacks (1973) wrote in his preface that this is a book about living people. He is concerned to preserve what is important, indeed what he would regard as essential.

That is,

*'The real and full presence of the patients themselves, the 'feeling' of their lives, their characters, their illnesses, their responses- the essential qualities of their strange situation'* (p. xiii)

Sacks' aim is to picture a world as a variety of worlds. He acknowledges the phenomenological view of the human being.

*'The landscapes of being in which these patients reside' (p. xiii)*

In referring to Sacks (1973) I have inferred and feel I share with him, my basic principles in terms of the ethical considerations of this study. In addition I wanted to show that both Sacks and I have investigated actively and have been prepared to create *thoughtscapes*, which include images and the barely achieved, but shared, the inevitably impossible goal of entering the world of the other. Sacks' (1973) comes close to describing what it is like to live as 'another', at times, in his vivid accounts and case stories. I also wanted to acknowledge, with humility, that empathic understanding of another can ultimately only be an ideal goal and that the possibility of glimpses into the world of the other be acknowledged as the treasures that they are.

As Sacks' (1973) patients live in their strange situation, likewise the participants in this research do too, as do all of us in the world. I, as researcher, can only but begin to know what that is truly like for each and every one of them. Therefore, the idea of initially **depicting** the data produced without analysis felt like keeping the participants alive and present as the constructors of it. This felt respectful and perhaps the only way to *snap* the essence of understanding achieved in that moment.

What this approach to exploration required was an active exploration of images and views and a continual jumping about and willingness to take part in imaginative

movement. Sacks (1973) acknowledged this and went on to say that this stylistic and epistemological problem for him, is also the very problem described by Wittgenstein (1953) when he spoke of depicting landscapes or as Sacks describes them, thoughtscales, using images and remarks.

I shared the epistemological problem with Wittgenstein and Sacks. My methodological approach and investigation can be seen in the context of preserving what is important to me too. That is, the real and full presence of the people who have spoken to me, crossed my path or been in close or professional relationships with me. I too wanted to preserve the feeling of their lives and the essential qualities of each person's strange situation. I too wanted to picture a world, a variety of worlds. I too wanted to be afforded the honour of walking in the landscapes of being, in which these people reside. In addition, I afforded myself the same respectful approach. I included myself because I started from the premise that the internal search of self would allow the discovery of the nature and personal meaning of the experience of loss and from this I could then develop methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. (Moustakas, 1990) My methodological approach was therefore heuristic in the beginning.

I wanted to be active in my approach, exploring images and views before sketching and also to be free to jump about and to extend my thinking by imaginative movement. This style of working permitted me to include images, everyday remarks, everyday observations, metaphors, repetitions and asides. I wanted to write in various styles including *narrative* and *reflective* to construct the text.

In addition to the above, I was aware that as a counsellor, play therapist, lecturer in counselling & ex-school teacher, that I have been part of many cultural groups of which I have first hand knowledge. My need to explore loss experience has made me sensitive to experiences as a member of these different groups. In this way I have conducted ethnographic research. This reflexive approach can be described as follows,

*'In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions. In fact collecting whatever data is available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research'*  
(Hammersley & Atkinson 1995, p.1)

Ethnography has a very long history as a research methodology (Wax, 1971) and in addition it was very attractive to me as an approach because,

*... 'it bears a close resemblance to the routine ways in which people make sense of their everyday lives. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.2.)*

In summary, my research approach is qualitative in that I intended,

*'to produce intensive, authentic, descriptive accounts of experience and action'*  
(McLeod, 1994, p.32)

In more detail, it is heuristic (Moustakas, 1990) in that I emphasised personal and subjective knowledge as essential components of objectivity (Bridgman, 1950). I was aware that I was possibly about to discover new images & new meanings of the human phenomenon beginning with self-realisation and my own life experience. In essence I wanted to stretch the boundaries of thinking on loss to include every day action with the risks and learning involved in that concept. It also included an ethnographic reflexive approach to collecting data. I intended to focus on action. The question I wanted to answer was:

***What do people do when they experience loss?***

Why focus on action? The literature on loss and bereavement concentrates on the internal process, the feelings, thoughts and internal suffering of those experiencing loss. Bowlby (1953, 1969, 1973, 1980) does examine the actions of the young child when separated from the main caregiver and Murray – Parkes (1970, 1971, 1972) relates this to the experience of irretrievable loss in the loss of a loved one permanently in adult life. In this model the acts of screaming and searching are given some place in the stage model of grief. The other so called, unhealthy action, (mummification) of attachment to objects and belongings of the deceased has been explored by Gorer (1965). Apart from searching and hanging onto things for what is generally considered too long, the literature largely ignores the everyday active experiences of those experiencing a loss. It was my gut feeling that these activities which remain invisible within grief theory are not only idiosyncratic in nature but contain power to help us manage our losses. A recognition of this and its incorporation into grief theory would offer the counsellor and others working in

helping professions to respect and value the experiences and actions of the grieving person, thus empowering them to realise that in the midst of distressing feelings that movement and growth can be taking place. Many people 'stuck' in unbearable suffering can also, in parallel experiences, seek out action in an intrinsically wise manner.

The sociologist Goffman in his essay, 'Where the action is' (1969) brings together the idea of chance-taking and resolution. He also asserts that action taking requires risk-taking behaviour.

*'Action, brings chance-taking and resolution into the same heated moment of experience; the events of action inundate the momentary now with their implications for the life that follows' (Goffman, 1969, p.199)*

*'Looking for where the action is, one arrives at a romantic division of the world. On one side are the safe and silent places, the home, the well-regulated role in business, industry, and the professions; on the other are all those activities that generate expression, requiring the individual to lay himself on the line and place himself in jeopardy during a passing moment.' (Goffman, 1969, P.205)*

The counsellor can provide a relationship in which the client is prepared to take risks and to help make visible the invisible actions carried out by the client, which may be holding and processing the loss. A relationship characterised by Rogerian *Core Conditions* (1957), can respect and acknowledge that so called 'grief work' involves very much more than Worden's (1991) list of tasks, for example.



My experience tells me that interaction is the location for grief work. In this study I have explored interaction in many of its guises. Bruner (1990) argues that meaning about anything in life lies in the interaction between the self and the world. I intended to extend and develop the idea of interaction as a location for learning to *grief work*, i.e. grief work chosen without much conscious thought by those experiencing the pain of loss, to include relationships and interaction with places and objects.

I began the process with my own story of loss experience (Moustakas, 1990). I then interviewed others to look for resonance. The study is an exploration, an exploration with knowledge gained in practice over the last few years. This afforded me opportunity to draw on ethnographic method in addition to collecting data from self and others in interviews.

I intended to go with the creative process involved and did not know quite where I would end up. I was looking forward to the journey of writing this thesis and made the most of the time it took to become a more considered and humble researcher.

Chapter Two

Method

*'Just as the dancer relies on the spine for the power and coherence of the dance, so the qualitative researcher relies on the design of the study. Both are elastic. Like the dancer who finds her center from the base of the spine and the connection between the spine and the body, the qualitative researcher is centered by a series of design decisions. A dancer who is centered may tilt forward and backward and from side to side, yet always returns to the center, the core of the dancer's strength. If one thinks of the design of the study as the spine and the base of the spine as the beginning of the warm – up dance, the beginning decisions in a study are very much like the lower – spine warm – up, the beginning warm – up for the dancer.*

*Valerie J. Janesick (1994)*

Below is a summary table describing which data were collected, in which sequence, and how the material gathered as data was analysed.

Summary Table

<i>Data collected</i>	<i>How the material was analysed</i>	<i>Sequence</i>
<i>Self-dialogue</i>	<i>Depicted as raw unedited dialogue &amp; 11 themes identified from within the text after period of immersion in the data and incubation.</i>	<i>1st</i>
<i>Transcribed In-</i>	<i>1. After the data was collected from each</i>	<i>2nd</i>

<p><i>depth, Semi-structured Interviews</i></p>	<p><i>participant, I entered into the material in timeless immersion. This was followed by a period of time when the data was set aside to enable me to come back to the task with fresh eyes and energy. Further reflection enabled me to create individual depictions for each participant.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>2. The depictions were designed intuitively selecting whatever 'jumped out' from each of the interview transcripts as showing resonance with the 11 themes (moments of illumination) identified after immersion in the data from the self-dialogue.</i></li> <li><i>3. After the first draft of each depiction I went back to the original data to check that it had truly captured the qualities and themes contained within it.</i></li> <li><i>4. When returning to the original data and the depictions co- identified material to develop an individual portrait (academic colleague &amp; research participant)</i></li> <li><i>5. One research participant joined me and a colleague in writing a published paper (Ingram et al, 2000) whilst I considered the data. During this process the three authors'</i></li> </ol>	
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	<p><i>constructed an individual portrait of loss.</i></p> <p>6. <i>'Eureka' style illumination of patterns of lifestyle of loss</i></p> <p>7. <i>Essential meaning structure created using an empirical phenomenological analysis to arrive at the essence of the phenomenon. This was constructed from raw interview data, individual depictions and autobiographical material.</i></p>	
<p><i>Play Therapy case notes &amp; video footage</i></p>	<p><i>Case study constructed and additional material woven into chapter on children.</i></p>	<p><i>3rd</i></p>
<p><i>Observation</i></p> <p><i>Field work (teaching and counselling)</i></p> <p><i>Personal life experience &amp; Personal journals &amp; letters</i></p>	<p><i>Material selected &amp; 'thickly' described (Geertz, 1973) in sections</i></p> <p>1. <i>Locating Loss in relationships and feeling moved to write about it</i></p> <p>2. <i>Locating the loss experience in the writing of another</i></p> <p>3. <i>Chapter on children</i></p> <p><i>Some material depicted as poems</i></p>	<p><i>4th</i></p>
<p><i>Selection of visual art work of E. Munch</i></p>	<p><i>Creative Synthesis</i></p> <p><i>A visual essay depicting the experience of loss</i></p>	<p><i>5th</i></p>

This chapter is structured around the five tasks of doing a research project (Alred, 1998). The tasks include:

1. Finding and clarifying research questions
2. Knowing what constitutes evidence
3. Being ethical in research design and process
4. Being reflexive as a researcher
5. Enabling others to learn from the research

### **1. Finding and clarifying research questions**

The first decision was to consider the rationale for the research design. I was aiming in this study to allow myself to be puzzled, unsure, mistaken and to change course through trial and error. This approach, says Minkin (1997) is both integral and conducive to creative research. Just like the dancer, described by Janesick (1994) I was aware that in order to be creative I must adhere to discipline and rigour and always return to the centre of my research design as a way of keeping the study on course, true to its philosophical underpinnings and maintaining clarity and coherence. The first task was to make some decisions as to the questions that guided the study. In order to do this I asked myself, what do I want to find out or engage with? I also asked myself, what am I passionate about? What am I curious about and what has gone before? These questions brought me to consider what was pressing and present with me in the moment as a counsellor working in the field of bereavement. What brought me to explore and want to know more about the experience of loss?

The twentieth century has given birth to a number of theories of grief. Walters (1999) writes of the existence of introductory overviews from various perspectives in Silverman & Klass (1996), Stroebe & Stroebe (1987), Fraley (2002) and Parkes (2001). The literature review chapter deals with these theories in detail later in the study. It is part of my approach that I did not engage with literature too closely until after I collected the data. I wanted the data to speak for itself and then go to the literature for resonance and possible differences.

*In this chapter I highlight only the aspects of theory that include the concept of grief work.* The prevailing theoretical views I find limiting in my counselling work with grieving persons. In my experience, the theories do not fully honour the lived experiences of the clients and others I have known, including myself, engaged in a grieving process. My aim was to explore the process of grief and to develop a model that brings something to the process that existing models do not. It is my sense, in my work as a bereavement counsellor and play therapist, that people are intrinsically wise and despite presenting as 'lost' or 'stuck' in the process, at times, are engaging usefully in grief work. I believe that an awareness of the innate ability to self-heal, through idiosyncratic grief work, could assist both the counsellor and those experiencing grief in fully trusting the process. This awareness and trust could be assisted by broadening the concept of grief work and offering a modification to the model based on a cognitive stress theory, Dual Process Model (DPM) (Stroebe & Schut, 2001). This model builds on a concept of grief work in the bereavement process defined by Worden (1991).

*'The research enterprise, is for the most part, made up of men and women standing on the shoulders of their predecessors, adding small bits and filling in the gaps in the mosaic of knowledge' (Thorson, 1996, p.179)*

Client-centred counselling theory (Rogers, 1951) acknowledges fully the wisdom of the client in the therapeutic process. I engaged in a research process that aimed to explore this quality of wisdom and related my findings to current bereavement theory. It was my hunch that not only do people know the best thing to think, feel or say in order to process loss but they also know *what to do* and set about doing it without the need for external direction. I have witnessed examples of this in my professional experience as a therapist and in my previous profession as a school teacher. It is my personal experience that this wisdom to know what to do seems to be evident in both adults and children. I was curious to follow up my hunch and to see where it led me. Therefore the main research question was,

***What do people do when experiencing a loss?***

And

***Does what people do when experiencing loss assist them in moving through the process of loss?***

The answer to the second question seemed to be yes, so a further question was asked.

*If what people do is healing and therapeutically moving then what are the implications of this knowledge for prevailing bereavement theory and consequent counselling practice?*

## 2. Knowing what constitutes evidence

*How will I know what I know?* An overarching consideration in engaging in any empirical research is for the researcher to ask the question, *what is truth?* This question necessarily embraces issues concerning the nature of reality, in other words ontological issues. It also begs clarity of issues pertaining to the nature of knowledge itself, or more succinctly, epistemological issues. At this point in the writing it feels important to be open to the reader and show my hand as to my stand on these philosophical dimensions at the base of all my conduct during this study. Lynch (1996) has pointed out that it can be a temptation in conducting research in the counselling field to ignore or discard philosophical ideas in order to get on with the practical aspects of the work. He argues for attention to the philosophical roots of the work on the basis that the research will be based on certain assumptions about reality and the nature of knowledge. Therefore, neglecting to understand or disclose these assumptions necessarily impedes the ability to be truly reflective in the process. To be critically aware of my stand on core philosophical issues seemed as important as the awareness of the focus of the study or the research method chosen to answer the research questions.

Lynch (1996) expands on his main point by stating that the range of methods now used by counselling researchers has enlarged. Much earlier, in the previous century, counselling research was for the most part based on quantitative methods. These



methods were designed to test hypotheses by collecting numerical data and subjecting the data to rigorous statistical analysis. These methods have agreed criteria for assessing validity. The growth of new methods, known as new paradigm research, employs qualitative methodology and involves collecting verbal data and creating descriptions or seeks to explain phenomena. From this change in the cultural context of research approaches in counselling it can be seen that there are strong arguments for developing more appropriate criteria for validity. McLeod (1994) describes a number of different criteria that have been developed to assess the adequacy or plausibility of qualitative research. He cites Kirk and Miller (1986) as a good source for identifying these. He further develops this thinking with reference to Lincoln and Guba (1989) who have argued that the main criterion for the judgement of validity of research studies should be *trustworthiness*. This encompassing description contains four components: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. McLeod (1994) further explains that these categories correspond to the quantitative categories of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity. In 1993, Stiles carried out a review of research criteria that seek to validate and McLeod (1994) includes a discussion that looks at the findings of that review.

So, there is much debate and consideration given to establishing validity. Lynch (1996) asserts that in the midst of this debate and developing approaches to validity there is one criterion against which all research can be assessed. This is that any research study should possess *internal consistency*. This felt like an anchor point, a secure base from which to start a research design.

Lynch (1996) details the process of internal consistency with illustration of a consistent logic. He begins from the philosophical base, which leads to the way in which the researcher begins to focus in on the process and consequently characterises the phrasing of the research question. This in turn determines the kind of method chosen to gather the data and to the ultimate conclusions that are finally drawn. Once the process begins with a clear view of the researcher's ontological and epistemological world view then further steps in the sequence must be consequential and deductively logical if consistency is to be achieved.

*'In other words, a particular philosophical perspective on the nature of reality and knowledge will lead logically to certain approaches to research rather than others. A piece of research achieves internal consistency when the approach taken in the research is consistent with the philosophical perspective on which the research is based.'* (Lynch, 1996, p.144)

### ***What is the philosophical basis of my research?***

Having stated my case for internal consistency in validity I turned to identify what that philosophical base is. Lynch (1996) identifies three perspectives on the nature of reality and knowledge and with these he indicates approaches to research that are consistent with them. Each perspective implies a commitment to a particular set of assumptions about the nature of the social world under investigation and the most appropriate way to learn about it

As a starting point in locating myself philosophically, that is, to identify my take on what constitutes reality and knowledge in the world, I explored each of these

categories in relation to my own values and beliefs and chose one of these categories and expanded upon it.

**Perspective 1: There is an objective reality and we are able to have an objective knowledge of this reality through the use of reason.**

According to Lynch (1996) the idea that we can gain an objective knowledge of the world through the use of reason can be traced back to classical Greek philosophy. Descartes rekindled an interest in this notion in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and revived the ideas of Plato and Socrates. The past two hundred years has seen a dominance of this view of reality and knowledge. Human reason is revered as the surest method for arriving at the truth about the world. Lynch (1996) describes this as a modern epistemology. This perspective is a useful one and I would argue a necessary one as a base for choosing a positivist methodology for obtaining certain kinds of knowledge about counselling.

It is possible to depict the approaches as polarised and in doing so I was conscious and reminded of the pluralistic approaches to the gaining of social knowledge that have been carried out in the field of counselling with useful results and knowledge gained. E.g. Goss and Mearns' studies (1997, 1997) called for a pluralist epistemological understanding of assessment and evaluation of counselling and an application of the same idea in evaluating employee counselling, accepting the veracity of both reductionist / positivistic and phenomenological / naturalistic philosophies in gaining understanding of human process.

However, acknowledging that the debate need not be a polarised one and seeing the usefulness of a pluralist approach, I argue that in this study the best approach is a qualitative one. I was concerned to know about people's experiences rather than what can be observed and recorded from the outside. Qualitative research can be described as having a focus on words rather than numbers as the unit for analysis. The study undertaken is only focussing on words as the unit for analysis. That is because the knowledge I was attempting to gain is to do with the internal world and interactions of those experiencing loss. In order to do this I needed to have evidence that is largely descriptive of experience and holds the complexity of this experience. The reader will be invited to make judgements as to the value of the research based on being provided with sufficient detail of experience at depth to do so. Words enable this process more usefully than numbers and their consequent analysis using statistical procedures.

Thus I turned to the two other perspectives identified by Lynch (1996) to locate my beliefs, values and assumptions about the world.

I wanted to take a journey of discovery that included nuanced accounts and to fully honour the experience of those participating in the research. I wanted this study to add to the knowledge base on loss that would influence the practice of counsellors and policy makers alike. Therefore I was seeking to build conclusions about the grieving process on the basis of convergence between different perspectives of it through the process of triangulation in the research. Therefore I needed to fit into a category that acknowledged that I needed to consider how truthful my findings were with no intellectual certainty about how to do this. This point, considers Lynch (1996) is an existential point. A point where certainty ends and hope and faith begin.

**Perspective 2: There is no objective meaning to reality; all meaning is a human creation influenced by social and cultural factors.**

As a category this one appealed to me strongly. I liked the questioning approach towards the modern epistemology that no knowledge is truly objective. I also agreed with the argument that we only see knowledge as objective because our social group shares a belief that it is true. The social constructionist approach leads to a post modern view of knowledge.

McLeod (2001) argues for a research approach which, '*... offers a set of flexible and sensitive methods for opening up the meanings of areas of social life that were previously not well understood*'. (p.1.)

I was pulled toward this argued for approach in my research and the philosophical post modern view of epistemologies that sees no inherent meaning in reality and that any meaning in life is created by humans sits comfortably with me as a core belief. Intellectual thinking in this arena includes Satre, ( 1905-1980) who expands on the idea of no inherent meaning to explicate the human condition of facing the existential challenge to find a meaning in life for each of us ourselves. His novels, plays and political activities were to engage with being in the world and making decisions about that within an infinite freedom. *'The truth is like finding you are free, but free in a prison.'* (Osborne, 1992, p.157) Jacques Derrida, points to the human activity of fragile linguistic conventions, as attempts to make meaning out of disorder and chaos. Lynch (1996) also cites Eco (1984, 1989) as a novelist who challenges the concept of

objective reality with its dangerous spin offs such as justifications for fanaticism and brutality.

In this second perspective there is an invitation to engage in research which offers explanations or accounts of reality which are acceptable, and seem plausible at an experiential level. I liked the idea of drawing the reader into a world of meanings that Lynch (1996) describes as seemingly useful and interesting. It is also a liberal philosophy, in that it would include the use of quantitative approaches if desired, although not within the scope of this study, not to try to get to any objective truth, but to add useful perspectives in another socially constructed way.

At this point I felt some discomfort as I wanted to add something to existing models of grief and had a strong desire to claim a truth should the data support me in it. I examined the last category designed by Lynch (1996) and then made a decision as to which of the last two perspectives would form the home for my study.

**Perspective 3: There is an objective order and meaning in reality, but our knowledge of this is always constrained by our social context.**

Whilst I was keen to consider how truthful the eventual research findings would be and I would have wanted to interrogate the data in a variety of ways, I was balking at the idea of some objective order and meaning in reality. It felt uncomfortable to assume an objective truth that is not available to any of us. It also begged the question that Lynch (1996) asks so succinctly

*‘... if we do not have a pure, objective knowledge of the truth about reality, then how can recognise truth when we see it? (p. 147)*

With the above in mind I decided to tie my flag to the mast of **Perspective 2**. I accept that there is no objective reality and all meaning is a human creation influenced by social and cultural factors.

### **The Choice of Method**

Having chosen a philosophical stance I then considered a research method. Why did I choose a heuristic method rather than grounded theory, empirical phenomenology, transpersonal research or auto-ethnography? I considered the other possibilities in a qualitative approach.

### **Grounded Theory**

Primarily, grounded theory is a method for the analysis of data, once collected (McLeod, 2001, p. 71). In my choosing of a research method I wanted to use something that gave me some guidance on the collection of data and also included a deeply subjective and reflexive role for the researcher. Heuristic research (Moustakas 1990) offered an exciting and personally appealing stance in that it starts from a personal experience of the researcher and legitimately explores that experience. I wanted to be immersed in and committed to the research process and Moustakas' (1990) approach appealed to me because I liked the idea of going on a very personal journey to discover. I knew it would be demanding and draw on everything I had both intellectually and emotionally to sustain myself on the journey and to complete the tasks involved. Whilst Glaser (1978) would also assert that a patient approach is

necessary and that the research process has its own momentum and cannot be hurried along, I felt that Moustakas' (1990) approach required a deeper level of personal immersion both in the gathering of data and in the incubation of it.

I also felt that a grounded theory approach, although designed to offer surprising outcomes was less risky as the data once collected could be systematically handled. Whereas the process of creating depictions and portraits from data with the waiting for a creative synthesis to emerge at some point would put me into a less secure place and give the opportunity to really sail close to the wind and to produce outcomes that could be emotionally arresting through media other than words.

I also had time at my disposal and was prepared to take the time to carry out the research, however long that took. I was aware of institutional demands but knew I had years rather than months to complete my work and took the opportunity to bathe in the expanse of time and not to force any of the process of gathering the data or in depicting it. McLeod (2001, p.135) advises for achieving conceptualisations of material '*perhaps as long as two years*'. I was prepared to give the process much longer.

I liked the idea of uncertainty and chaos and as a characteristic of heuristic research I felt it matched the nature and content of my own life when experiencing loss. The congruence between the method and my state of mind does not escape my awareness as contributing to choice of method at the time.

I can see McLeod's (2001,) point when he states that grounded theory '*works*'. He elucidates.



*'It is capable of enabling researchers to produce work that is rigorous, plausible and applicable' (p.88)*

McLeod (2001) gives many examples of studies that have been both exciting and stimulating in the counselling and psychotherapy world in the UK (Howe, 1989, 1996, Dale, Allen & Measor, 1998, Arthern & Madill, 1999) He also mentions North American studies (Bolger, 1998, Frontman & Kunkel, 1994) He qualifies his list by stating that it is important that the reader considers the claim of this approach as *'uniquely rigorous and systematic'* (2001 p.88) He cites Rennie's (1998) work as recognising that because there are many different ways of carrying out grounded theory research then there cannot be a rigorous and systematic claim. Rennie (1998) offers an alternative view and states that by reducing the approach to a symbiosis of abduction and induction. McLeod (2001) sees this as unhelpful and as making the problem more entrenched. He further asserts that if we consider the core of grounded theory to be seen as an,

*'... abstract principle... ...possible to enact or operationalise that principle in several different ways'* (McLeod, 2001, p.88)

Then, argues McLeod (2001) grounded theory can be thought of as having many methods and also instability. This is because the researchers have to adapt to the particular circumstances of their research. In this way grounded theory has the same qualities as *bricoleur* (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994)

The concept of *bricoleur* describes the research method I eventually ended up developing through the process of collecting the data and handling it in different ways. The word is French and describes a manual worker who gets things done not by following conventional methods of the craft in question, but achieves the task by any means possible.

Innovative researchers in the past have been prepared to produce papers that '*stray into the border between science and art*', (McLeod, 2001, p.119) doing whatever seemed necessary to further knowledge and understanding in the process. This sometimes means 'thinking outside the box' and moving into other kinds of methods in order to stretch and look further.

### **Empirical phenomenology,**

I realised that if I did manage to discover some new meanings, created by humans in a social and cultural context, about what it is to do grief work, that are outside current theories of grief, then I would want to look for resonance by taking the data gathered within the heuristic process and give it an alternative eye, i.e. moving from the academic rigour of 'critical subjectivity' to 'epoche' (bearing in mind the criticisms of Martin (2005) given in more detail in the section on criticisms of the heuristic method later on in the chapter) That is, from heuristic method to a phenomenological method. In this way I hoped to get at the *essence* of the experience. My intention was, as is usual with qualitative research, for the research design to be an emergent process. (Denscombe, 2000) The final decisions as to where to go with analysing the data as opposed to depicting it in the heuristic method were made after the heuristic depictions were produced.

## Transpersonal research

In his article, *Can Research be Transpersonal?* Braud (1998) suggests expanding present research methods and creating new ones in order to extend both through and beyond other forms of knowing. In this way, he suggests that qualitative methods can become more suitable for transpersonal studies. This implies and he further describes that transpersonal researchers tend to use conventional methods for collecting and dealing with data and that it is the content of the study that is of a transpersonal nature. For example, Palmer (1998) explores exceptional human experience largely via autobiographical data. However, Braud (1998) writes of the evolution of the self and compares it to the evolution of research method in that we do not develop ourselves in a linear fashion but in circumambulation (Jung, 1965) neither does research method evolve in a linear style.

*'I see similar processes in research, in practical work (e.g. clinical counselling, spiritual guidance) in everyday life, and in pursuing one's own spiritual path-Being mindful, making careful observations, exercising discernment, noting patterns, attempting to identify the possible sources of things, attempting to do these things without too much attachment, bias or prejudice- and doing this so that we and others may benefit from what is learned. All of this is engaging in disciplined inquiry. In research, we go about this more carefully and more formally'. (Braud, 1998, p. 2-3)*

Braud's (1998) account of how research activity is of a similar nature to counselling and being spiritually aware is a useful one and causes me to think that transpersonal approaches to research method are, as a separate approach, in their infancy. It appears

that largely transpersonal researchers use known qualitative methods and favour close attention to ethical behaviour. I am left with the feeling that a transpersonal approach to research has yet to develop as a discreet method and borrows much from existing approaches. In many ways the arguments put forward by Braud (1998) for a combination of approaches to gathering data is not unlike the concept of *bricoleur*, previously described. Maybe there is a move in all qualitative approaches towards convergence of method and a sharing of whatever is useful and extends exploration.

There are interesting comparisons with a person-centred approach to research. When I began the study, I can only state that my philosophical position was rooted in the idea that there is no objective meaning to reality and all meaning is a human creation influenced by social and cultural factors. To refine this position I state that I threw my hat into another philosophical arena, of a Person-centred approach to research (Mearns & McLeod, 1984). This is the core approach I aligned with as a counsellor and therefore the emphasis on the relationship between the researcher and the researched felt a natural focus for me as a researcher. Therefore my research focus, the phrasing of my research questions and methods selected were and I felt, must be, consistent with this frame of reference. I aimed to produce sensitive and thorough accounts of the way in which those experiencing loss made sense of their worlds. This is in contrast to methods that attempt to identify the environmental or internal variables that determine that experience. (Mearns & McLeod, 1984). In addition, I decided, any claims to truth must be couched within this perspective. I acknowledge when I speak of truth I speak of a truth amongst many truths, not the truth.

I intended to carry out the study with integrity. As McLeod (2001) states, technical requirements such as the appropriate method, implemented with skill, an appropriate presentation of data and analysis in addition to a coherent discussion are all essential requirements of good quality research but can be of limited value if the researcher is not courageous, honest and committed to the task of inquiry. In addition McLeod (2001) adds that the discussion of the personal qualities of the researcher can be thought of as embarrassing and going against the concept of a scientific method. However, he asserts that the researcher should resonate with the reader. Personal validity can be claimed if the attitude of the researcher is to value or prize the researched. If the research is carried out within relationships characterised by Rogerian core *conditions* (Rogers, 1957) then this will go a long way to maintaining the integrity of the researcher (Mearns & McLeod, 1984). I intended to maintain a rigorous approach by being systematic and self conscious in the research design and in the collection of data. I aimed to be transparent in the interpretations I made and to communicate with as much clarity as is possible. (Mays & Pope, 1995)

### **Autoethnography**

Increasingly, personal narrative is becoming significant in postmodern ethnography (Kraver, 2005). In this study I plan to use autobiographical narrative as part of my data collection. This method of collecting data is adequately covered within heuristic method described by Moustakas (1990) as self-dialogue. The researcher is invited to dialogue with the self to generate material about the phenomenon under investigation. In this way one is enabled to access the memories, thoughts and feelings located within the self and life experience. This is an important starting point in heuristic

method and from this self exploration the study expands to look for resonance in the experience of others.

It is interesting to see that subjective texts such as '*memoirs, anecdotes and confessions*' (Kraver, 2005, p. 318) are now being encompassed in the research approach of auto-ethnography. The novel by Caroline Ellis (2004) addresses this development in research in a creative and unusual way as it describes both the research and writing that is achieved in a class that are grappling with the auto-ethnographic method. Such human activities are naturally the human experiences observed and explored in the heuristic method and autobiographical narrative no stranger to Moustakas (1990)

### **Addressing Quality**

I was aware that whatever I found out would be partial and socially, culturally and historically constructed and therefore open to re-interpretation. This is the limited nature of this kind of study rooted in a philosophy that acknowledges that reality is subjective and meaning socially constructed. I hoped that my study would be interesting, useful and evocative. McLeod (2001) believes that quantitative research can '*generate a compelling authority*' (p.189) and it is much more difficult to address the question of quality in qualitative research. My desire was for my study to influence practice amongst counsellors and agency administrators responsible for policy and procedures. The foundation stone of this study had been laid and I approached the proceeding activities with courage, honesty and commitment in the hope that personal integrity would, alongside rigorous research methods, would bring about an influential outcome.

Having found a philosophical home and considered other research approaches I attempted to develop this position and describe my intended method for collecting data. The method chosen has grown out of a philosophical historical background and I illustrated this as follows.

### **Heuristic Method**

I chose heuristic method as my main approach (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic research method gives a greater priority to the direct use of self as part of the research process than other qualitative approaches. In this way the approach is rooted in an existential phenomenology because it recognises that it is impossible to leave the self out of or to rise above the journey of discovery. The fact that it deliberately foregrounds the use of subjectivity to understand the external world separates it from other methods rooted in the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl (Osborne, 1992). Husserl argued that in the process of 'transcendental intersubjectivity' any essences of experience and any meanings arrived at can be shown by analogy to resemble those of others. The individual has to rid themselves of presuppositions (bracket them off) in order to come to knowledge by a process of reduction to what is vividly clear.

Indeed heuristic study can be seen as a rather romantic notion linked to the Romantic tradition in philosophical thinking (Shea, 1995), in which it is believed that the interior world of the individual is the location of knowledge about and all elements of noumenal reality. In this approach there is no Kantian struggle with concepts of subject and object and ideas about inner and outer (Osborne, 1992). Shea (1995) clarifies, that against these influences from philosophy it is easy to see how an inward

journey can yield valid data about a human phenomenon. She uses a metaphor borrowed from Catherine of Sienna.

*'... while methods .....come at the use of the self from the perspective of **the fish immersed in the sea** and exploring its depths from identifiable positions with particular visual apparatus, heuristic research- at the extreme end of the spectrum- comes from the opposite direction- from the perspective of **the sea's being in the fish**, with new information about the nature of the sea being gleaned from close examination of its passage through the fish's system. '* (Shea, 1995 p.7)

Thus the heuristic researcher uses the self as the primary tool for gaining understanding of the inner lives of others. Immersion in the experience studied is fundamental to the process and it can feel like the researcher's life is absorbed into the phenomenon under consideration. In this role, the researcher is mercilessly involved as opposed to the cooler detached role of a quantitative researcher. I was actively involved in the construction of data as I lived my life and recorded my experiences. My values, social background, identity and beliefs will have had significant bearing on what data was collected and how it was interpreted and is presented. More than this though, heuristic research, the major method employed, refers to a process which is an internal search. In this process I aimed to discover the nature and the meaning of experience. I was attempting to discover what it means to me to experience loss and from this self-knowledge created depictions and created a synthesis that embodies the experience. In addition I have many years of clinical observation as a counsellor and play therapist. These experiences have informed me in my understanding of what it is to experience loss. I also intended, if applicable, to develop methods and procedures



for further investigation and analysis. In this way I was present throughout the process. Whilst an in depth understanding of loss developed, I also wanted my self-awareness and self-knowledge to grow. Hence, the need to develop a rigorous approach of critical subjectivity, in order to gain a meta perspective on experiences in the interest of being able to evaluate the findings and locate these within the current knowledge about the grief process. I was aware that the process would hurtle me and my thoughts and feelings from a private place into a more visible, exposing domain.

*'The heuristic process is a way of being informed, a way of knowing. Whatever presents itself in the consciousness of the investigator as perception, sense, intuition, or knowledge represents an invitation for further elucidation. What appears, what shows itself as itself, casts a light that enables one to come to know more fully what something is and means. In such a process not only is knowledge extended but the self of the researcher is illuminated'. (Moustakas, 1990, p.11)*

### **Criticism of Heuristic Method -Sela –Smith, (2002)**

Sela –Smith, (2002) has written an interesting paper critiquing Moustakas's method. She conducted a review of twenty-eight research documents with research designs based on heuristic method. She found only three that did follow the method. In most she found no evidence of what she calls, *'free-fall surrender to the process that was described as jumping into a river, a leap into the darkness'* (p.70) The majority did not engage in personal subjective experience. Indeed in twenty-five of the cases, *'there was no report of the internal discovery of the tacit dimension'* (p.70) In essence the self-search is missing. My aim was to adhere to the method by writing down my

own self-search as the first task of writing up the study. I was vigilant in leaving no stone unturned and was prepared to jump into the void to go with the experience and be the '*I-who-feels*' (p. 71) demanded by Sela-Smith (2002) as evidence of authentically being a heuristic researcher. She further argues that bringing in co participants can lead to a distraction from the internal process. I do not believe that this has to be the case. I defend the intention to do so and point to the co-constructed nature of an interview.

Furthermore Sela-Smith (2002) points out that Moustakas's earlier writings indicate that the search to understand loneliness was a response to a crisis in his life, not a search to develop a research method. She expands on this idea to assert that the heuristic question should have been '*What is **my** experience of loneliness?*' rather than '*What is **the** experience of loneliness?*' This former question would have had the power to take him into the tacit dimension of his overall feeling of loneliness, it is argued. She suspects he was terrified of facing it and maybe the need to make a decision about the surgery for his child at the time would necessitate that the painful, unformed question would be dismissed. So, the message is, do not cut yourself off from the feelings. I knew that I must be aware and mindful of staying with my pain of loss and did not miss the opportunity of getting into the deepest foundations of my tacit knowledge about loss. I intended to dialogue with myself and hoped to discover what was calling out to me to be more deeply understood.

Overall Sela-Smith (2002) observes that the heuristic method has the potential to enter the tacit dimension in a more effective way than any other research method. Validity is achieved by the researcher completely surrendering to the process. I was conscious

to allow the process to unfold, and I noticed that through self-search inquiry that a hoped for expansion in my self-awareness did result, and a deeper understanding did occur. Self-transformation provided evidence of the process happening and moving through me. My hope was that others must be able to experience in the 'story' in whatever form it takes.

### **Criticisms of Heuristic Method -Peter Martin (2005)**

Martin (2005) questions the tension that is apparent between realism and essence.

*'The lure of heuristic inquiry is its apparent openness. What better than to "find out"? How exciting to envisage the "Eureka" experience! But the arrival at such an outcome depends on the discipline of "Epoche" where the researcher sets aside presuppositions and, in a sense, works outside of his/her subjectivity. This way of addressing the problem of how an intersubjectively created world looks at itself relies on Husserl (1931). He argues that in order to cope meaningfully with the world of subjectivity and of objects we need to "bracket" experience and abstain from making judgements about whether the world does or does not exist. This strategy is designed to avoid the charge of solipsism, and therefore to make the claim to be seriously scientific. Moustakas understands the difficulties of "bracketing" thus:*

***The challenge of Epoche is to be transparent to ourselves, to allow whatever is before in consciousness to disclose itself so that we may see with new eyes in a naive and completely open manner (1994:56).***

*My difficulty in accepting this internally logical argument is that bracketing or Epoche must always be partial. If bracketing off is necessary to reach a notional "real" why not then go the whole hog and bracket off as much as possible, as in traditional realist methodology? Or why bracket at all? How can the leap be made from subjective experiencing to an apperception of the real by such an imprecise and flimsy device? Is it not better to say "I know that as a result of disciplined enquiry I have come to certain understandings about my relationship with what I perceive to be objects in my world"? Perhaps that is all we can know?' (Martin, 2005, p. 48)*

I agree with Martin (2003) and feel that it is better to embrace the subjective experience and offer it out for others to judge whether or not the researcher has captured the essence of the experience.

In addition Martin (2005) questions the 'building block' view of the management of data. Does a sequential process feign a kind of quasi-positivist approach? Why he asks, for instance, should there only be three depictions? Does the number matter? (p.49)

He also questions the discreet nature of the mode of heuristic method. A segregated approach to the gathering of data does not in Martin's view seem to be necessary and he argues for also including quantitative findings if these can add to the knowledge of the experience being generated. He states that, Lincoln and Guba (2000) argue that responsive evaluation can include whatever information that answers questions about some unresolved experience including those that are claims, concerns or other issues.

Martin (2005) argues for greater creativity and a broader expression of the outcomes of heuristic research.

*'There is a need to address the whole business of communicability. I indicate in the introduction to the Creative Synthesis that Moustakas tends towards the recondite and perhaps inaccessible. Can the language of esoteric metaphor communicate adequately to an academic community? His synthesis appears to me to be a set of generalisations without power. There is clearly not one answer to this question but I am attempting (particularly in Chapters Seven and Eight) a more catholic approach to the expression of the outcome of heuristic research. This is where and why the discourse changes for a while. I hope to encourage such catholicity in others.'*  
(Martin, 2005, p. 50)

I agree with this and am willing to let the outcomes in this study to be expressed freely and without feeling the need to stick rigidly to Moustaka's (1990) prescription for process in the heuristic method.

### **How did I collect data?**

The methods used in this study have developed in response to the demands of the study. Out of the many alternatives available of methodological genres I carved out a path to begin the journey of discovery. I was aware and mindful of the concept of 'researcher as bicolour' (McLeod, 2001, p.119) I decide that the method of data collection would emerge rather than be pre-imposed. I had a structure in mind in the beginning and intended to stray from that plan and add to it as the process seemed to

require. I kept in mind the metaphor of the dancer and saw the research design as the spine bending this way and that from the centre. I intended to be vigilant about staying true to philosophical underpinnings and acted in accordance with ethical guidelines. The aim was for internal consistency. Within that I felt free to choreograph the dance of the research itself.

The main thrust of my approach to this study was to follow a heuristic stance. In addition I have an interest in the social phenomenon of the world of the 'lost' and by employing an ethnomethodological slant on data available to me I aimed to elucidate on how this particular world is produced and perceived by those who are members of it.

The study is small scale to enable a focus on in-depth experience and holistic in character. As with other qualitative approaches heuristic study tends to be small scale. There is a prevailing undercurrent in quantitative research methods that the larger the sample of the number of research participants the better. In qualitative studies, this is not the case. The nature of this research is that it is intense and concentrates on an in depth approach. Indeed, there are excellent studies that involve the intensive examination of only one subject (Thorson, 1996). The term subject, used by Thorson does not sit comfortably with my approach to collecting data. I prefer the term participant as the people I intended to approach would be approached as equals in the desire to explore the experience of loss not subjects for me to glean from.

The subject under investigation, that of what people do when they experience loss, cries out for concentrated gazing. I am both attracted and compelled to know.

Moustakas (1990) describes this heuristic method of research as a quest to undertake and complete. I felt driven to know and to understand the experience and I was also aware as a counsellor and counsellor educator that an awareness of my flow of experience is the only way of knowing. It can be argued that only by paying attention to the flow of feelings within, can one sense the implicit meanings of any life experience. The internal frame of reference is the location for the development of self-knowledge. (Rogers, 1961) Heuristic methods value the process of self-awareness in the research process and endeavourers to retain and make visible this process in the methods of collecting and recording evidence. This process makes visible the heart and depth of human experience. Therefore I began to collect data by asking myself questions.

### **Self-dialogue**

In self-dialogue I began to explore my inner world and to extract what the experience of loss meant to me and explore what it is that I did when in the process. (Moustakas, 1990, p.43)

### **Dialogue with others**

When I had material derived from my inner search I turned to others to dialogue with them. In-depth interviews were planned and conducted.

### **The interview process**

It feels important to acknowledge that what I wanted to do was to get below the surface of human experience. To move away from what is directly observable to what

experience of loss means to those experiencing it. Therefore, the only way was to ask people about the experience.

The literature on interviewing suggests that the process can be defined as gathering interview data as a *resource* or as a *topic* (Rapley, 2004 p.16). Seale (1998) in the overview of qualitative interviews identifies these two major traditions. That is, interview data as *resource* in which, the interview is seen as reflecting the interviewees' reality outside the interview. In contrast, interview as *topic* sees the interview data collected as more or less reflecting a reality jointly constructed by the interviewer and the interviewee. In addition it is relevant to bear in mind that all this takes place within a time and a place. That is what is constructed is constructed temporally, socially and culturally.

*'To focus on interview talk does not exclude the idea that the talk takes place within a wider cultural arena. The talk is reflexively situated within this arena.'*  
(Silverman, 1993)

The social constructionist school of thought would argue that, memory, for example, is not the property of an individual but a social activity. So, when people come together to talk about loss in a research activity the participants collectively reconstruct what the culture already knows as part of its socio-historical evolution about loss. That is, what is potentially recoverable from amongst the available cultural artefacts and customs. In this way cognitive activity is distributed amongst the group (the researcher and the participants, supervisor and any others discussing the research as it is collected.) In this way knowledge about anything (including loss) can be



gained which not one of us has the knowledge to achieve independently. (Hutchins, 1988 ; Middleton, 1987)

*'As any conversation proceeds, it does so on the basis of a continuously updated but contentious understanding of what has been said so far, what is understood, what is yet to be resolved.'* (Middleton & Edwards, 1990, p.26)

So a shared context was an important backdrop to consider when using data from an interview.

*'Part of this shared context for speaking is a continuously reworked collective memory'* (Middleton & Edwards, 1990, p.26)

In this way people construct versions of events when talking about them.

Remembering in conversation can be seen as organised social action. In addition to the nature and vicissitudes of individual cognition, reports of past are versions accomplished by conversational work.

So the cry goes out,

*'DON'T RIP THE WORDS OUT OF THE CONTEXT'* (Rapley, 2004 p.16)

In this sense the interviewees demonstrated some of the possible ways that are available to understand experience and talk about loss. These were then contrasted

with other possible ways. Such as, other interviews, textbooks on loss, self-dialogue experiences of counselling and therapy etc.

Data can never be context free. Resource data is criticised by constructionists as derived from- ‘inherently interactive events’ (both speakers mutually monitor each other’s talk, gestures etc.) and talk is ‘locally and collaboratively produced’. In other words the interview becomes a kind of gestalt made up by both the interviewer and the participant. This rich and interesting view of data generated by interaction added clarity to the process and also reminded me that life is being constructed at the same time as I was trying to capture it and know about it in some way. When trying to study culture an anthropologist spoke of the idea as similar to trying to study snow in the middle of an avalanche. (Carrithers, 1992) In the same way whilst I was exploring the experience of loss it continued to occur. Loss was not only being reflected on but also being constructed as a human experience during the interviews. (Berger, 1963) Therefore, the idea of depicting the data produced, keeping the participants alive and present as the constructors of it felt respectful and perhaps the only way to snap the essence of understanding achieved in that moment.

Another important point I was conscious of is that interview talk is not only about the stated topic of the interview. In interviews people produce themselves as the adequate or the good interviewee and or as a specific person in relation to the topic of the interview. Therefore each interview was,

*...an artefact, a joint accomplishment of interviewer and respondent. As such its relationship to any 'real' experience is not merely unknown but in some senses unknowable topic'. (2004, Rapley, p.16)*

So, interviewing is not a way of discovering the truth but a way of constructing a truth. A truth located temporally and culturally. Therefore the final product was a joint venture and not presented as individual experience. It seemed important to me to value this construction and to celebrate the knowledge presented. People should remain present in the final presentation of knowledge gained in this process. The results of heuristic research may include a reintegration of derived knowledge, arisen as a discovery during this creative process and a synthesis characterised by intuitive and tacit understanding. The opposite was true of the phenomenological research, where people were lost in the final analysis. In the heuristic study then the participants were visible and portrayed without losing their wholeness. I was seeking to retain this wholeness and to be aware of the co-constructed nature of the data collected.

### **So, how did I to select the participants?**

I turn to my rationale for sampling and the implications of my approach. Rubin and Rubin (1995) identify four key areas to consider when recruiting participants to be interviewed.

1. Finding a knowledgeable informant
2. Getting a range of views
3. Testing emerging themes with new interviewees
4. Choosing interviewees to extend results

Denscombe (2000, p.15) identifies choosing people for their known experience of the phenomenon as a purposive sample, hand-picked for the research. They are selected with a specific purpose in mind. In addition, it can be observed that, in practice, the choosing of research participants to interview can happen on a chance basis, whilst living a social life (Rapley, 2004)

The interviews were in depth and lasted as long as the experience required. I predicted that they would be approximately one and a half hours each. This proved to be about right. This method of data collection was, by its nature, time limited if compared to the ethnographic research in which the collection of data occurred over an extended period of time. It also required me to participate in the lives of my participants. I intended to be courageous and stayed alongside my interviewees. The interview was semi-structured using eight questions designed by Moustakas (1990) and adapted to suit the phenomenon of loss.

1. What do you know about the experience of loss?
2. What qualities or dimensions of the experience stand out for you?
3. What examples of loss are vivid and alive?
4. What events, situations and people are connected with the experience?
5. What feelings and thoughts are generated by the experience of loss?
6. What somatic states are you aware of in the experience of loss?
7. What time and space factors affect your awareness and meaning of loss?
8. Have you shared all the significant ingredients or constituents of the experience?

Heuristic investigation is strongly characterised by connectedness and relationship, whilst phenomenology values detachment from the phenomenon under scrutiny.

*'... ..heuristics leads to depictions of essential meanings and portrayal of the intrigue and personal significance that imbue the search to know.' (Moustakas, 1990, p.38)*

This is in contrast to phenomenology, which allows the researcher to arrive at definitive descriptions of the structures of experience. Heuristic method seeks to retain the essence of the person in the experience under investigation. I endeavoured to offer a safe relationship to encourage the participants to speak freely. The eight questions were supported by counselling skills and the participants were facilitated in an exploration of their own experiences.

### **Case Study, clinical observation & Ethnographic study**

In order to take part in a methodological study one must have a deep familiarity with the aspect of the world being studied. I was familiar with the world of loss. At the same time the ordinariness of loss from a common sense perspective could have prevented me from entering into a stance of distance, in order to see how it is socially constructed as a cultural practice. Common sense practices can be very hard to see because they are so self-evident to their practitioners. One way of making common sense practices more visible is to observe situations in which practices are particularly acute for self or others. One cannot choose to enter the world of those experiencing loss, however due to whims of fate I have found myself in that world alongside others. Consequently I had the opportunity to study how one deals with that situation

and also to observe others. Loss and the subsequent bereavement that follows is common place and all human beings have to deal with loss of varying degrees from time to time. By its very nature it is deeply personal and internal for the sufferer. This makes it hard to enter the world of those who are or who are working through the aftermath of significant loss experience.

As a counsellor who has worked with bereaved clients for more many years, I have much privileged experience of being permitted to enter these private worlds of grief. This has afforded me much opportunity to study the experience as a member. I have been able to study from the inside what it is to be a member of the world of loss experience both as a counsellor and as a mourner. Becoming a member is a way of combining researcher practice and observation. In this way ethnographic research method was also available to me as part of this exploration.

*'It provides a kind of intimate access to the experience that does not seem to be available by other means such as detached observation.'* (ten Have, 2004, p.159)

Thorson (1996) identifies studies by Glaser & Strauss, (1967a, 1967b, 1968) as studies which were based on intensive field work involving observation and interviewing. I have fourteen years experience of working as a bereavement counsellor and three as a play therapist with bereaved children aged between three and sixteen years old. In addition to ethnographic data gathered over many years I have also drawn up case studies to present to supervision and to use in my teaching as a University Lecturer in Counselling and a trainer of counsellors in the voluntary sector.

Thorson (1996) argues that an ethnographic research method is time consuming and can be seen as laborious. In my case, yes it was time consuming but not laborious. It consists of observations I have made working in practice as a counsellor bringing both knowledge and reward and awareness that has influenced my practice. This experience led to a case study an ethnographic aspect to the study in conjunction with three in- depth interviews, which built on a self-study as the starting point (Moustakas, 1990)

### **Other Qualitative Research by Practitioners**

There is both a long tradition in the therapeutic world of researching using a case study method to learn more about therapeutic work and a current resurgence of acceptance by Clinical Psychological journals of case studies as a worthy and valid method of learning about therapeutic practice.

The case study material in this study offers much to practitioners and my experience in presenting the material to international conferences for counsellors and in offering the material in teaching is that it is well received and stimulates thought, discussion and illustrates the experience of loss in a way that can be understood and considered to add to the knowledge base for practitioners.

Freud (1901, 1909, & 1910) used client case studies to explore psychoanalysis.

McLeod (1994) includes a chapter entitled *Systematic Inquiry into Individual Cases* to examine this practice chronologically. In addition to Freud's work he mentions the work of Watson and his famous study of *Little Albert* to illustrate the power of

behaviourist techniques. He further describes the case material offered by Rogers (1942, 1951) important texts establishing Client-centred counselling. He goes on in the chapter to cite collections of case studies by Wedding and Corsini (1979), Kutash and Wolf (1986) and Dryden (1987)

Text books used to train counsellors such as Mearns and Thorne (1988) include reference to case studies of the author's client work to illustrate counselling practice in action.

McLeod (1994) asserts that although case studies have been used to aid teaching they have also been used to stimulate research. He further adds that it is a method of research that can add to the knowledge base of counselling in a highly relevant way. In terms of applicability it is an excellent method for other practitioners to make use of learning gained in their own practice. In terms of researcher role the case study is a way of collecting data in the course of normal therapeutic practice.

I am aware of the history of academic acceptance of the case study as being a valid research method due to traditional medical and psychology research methods with respect for methods that are large scale and findings considered to be generalisable. However, as McLeod (1994) has noted, in recent years, there has been a slowly growing acceptance by established Clinical Psychology journals of research articles focussing on single case studies. McLeod (1994) lists Hans Strupp (1980) as producing a series of four case studies. This was then followed by Hill, Carter & O'Farrell (1983) and others in the 1980's and early 90's. McLeod (1994) points out the important step made when,



*'... the special section of **Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology** devoted to single case research in psychotherapy (Jones, 1993) offers a further sign of the increasing recognition given to this method.'* (p.105)

### **How did I analyse data?**

The interview data was handled first and foremost as part of the heuristic process. The process of heuristic analysis is outlined, as a guide, by Moustakas, (1990, p.51). After I collected the data from one participant, I entered into the material in timeless immersion. This was followed by a period of time when the data was set aside to enable me to come back to the task with fresh eyes and energy. Further reflection enabled me to create individual depictions for each participant.

*'The depiction is complete in itself. Interpretation not only adds nothing to heuristic knowledge but removes the aliveness and vitality from the nature, roots, meanings and essences of experience.'* (Moustakas, 1990, p.19)

Then, as Moustakas (1990) suggests, I went back to the original data after the first draft of the depiction to check that it had truly captured the qualities and themes. Then I moved on to the next participant. He suggests sharing the depiction with the participant for affirmation of its comprehensiveness and accuracy and also to welcome deletions and additions. I did not follow this part of the process for ethical reasons. This process was repeated until all the depictions were complete. Then the depictions can be gathered together again the researcher enters a period of immersion with intervals of rest until a composite depiction is constructed. This construction

should embrace the themes and qualities of the experience for the whole group of participants. The core meanings of the phenomenon should be present. The next stage is one of returning again to the original data and the depictions, composite depiction, if there is one, to identify key participants to develop some individual portraits. These portraits should be constructed from raw data, individual depictions and autobiographical material. I was party to a construction of one portrait. One participant joined me and a colleague in writing a paper whilst I considered the data. During this process the three authors' constructed an individual portrait of loss. Finally, a creative synthesis was produced that, according to Moustakas (1990) encourages a wide range of freedom in its composition. It consists of a visual presentation of visual artwork. It attracted tacit intuitive awareness of the experience of loss. This knowledge would have been in the process of incubation over the months and years of the study. It is the outcome of numerous experiences of immersion, illumination and explication. In this stage Moustakas (1990) describes the researcher as a '*scientist-artist*' developing,

*... ..an aesthetic rendition of the themes and essential meanings of the phenomenon.*

*(p.52)*

He writes of a free reign of thought in which the researcher's passion for the quest, knowledge of the phenomenon and personal presence is drawn together in a creative presentation. This can be a narrative, poem, work of art, story or metaphor. In this case it was visual art.

The whole process of heuristic research excited and inspired me. I looked forward to gathering the data and throwing myself into the process that followed. I also asked myself '*What other methods are available?*' I planned to take the same data derived from the interviews and explore another way to handle it. How at beginning of the data collection I was not sure. I would come to this in due time. Eventually, I analysed the data using an empirical phenomenological approach to arrive at the essence of the phenomenon of loss.

In addition to the self-dialogue and interviews there was data available to me from my work as a counsellor and play therapist. Some of this data was case notes from therapy, some video recordings of play therapy, and case studies from teaching in primary school. This data was presented and also analysed for resonance with the illuminations gained from the self-dialogue and interview data and depictions.

### **Validity Criteria**

In order to maintain quality in the research as it progressed, the following section on validity of the research design and procedure was considered. Checking on the validity of qualitative research can prove difficult as the usual concepts of reliability and validity are not useful as they have developed to screen quantitative research. In 1993, Stiles carried out a review of research criteria that seek to validate qualitative research and McLeod (1994, p.97-101) includes a discussion that looks at the findings of that review and lists nine points to consider when evaluating the validity of qualitative research. I used this framework to ensure that the quality of my research was upheld.

1. *Clarity and comprehensiveness of the description of research procedures employed.*

*'Just as the dancer relies on the spine for the power and coherence of the dance, so the qualitative researcher relies on the design of the study. Both are elastic.'*

(Janesick, 1994)

I designed the study around a clear and comprehensive structure (Alred, 1998) I was willing to allow the process to be elastic in the way that Janesick (1994) describes.

I had established a philosophical viewpoint and whatever decisions that would need to be made I intended only to make in congruence with the philosophical base to the study.

The elasticity was to be tempered by returning to the research questions and checking that each move in the process formed part of a coherent whole

I intended for my epistemological stance to be solid throughout the study. I hope within that stance to open up new meanings around the experience of loss.

I planned to keep a careful record of the procedures followed and the chronological unfolding of the new learning. I have included a table to guide the reader through the process at the beginning on the methods chapter.

There is a clear account of why I have chosen heuristic research method and not others available within a qualitative genre in this chapter.

## *2. Sufficient contextualisation of the study*

The research design considered that the study would be qualitative, small scale and located within the UK. In addition there was a plan to consider ethnographic material gathered over some period of time when I was teaching and working as a counsellor and play therapist. This material will come from both national and international contexts.

I hoped that the findings from the study would prove useful to therapeutic and educational communities. The study was designed to challenge prevailing theory in the light of other cultural ideas about loss and bereavement.

## *3. Adequacy of Conceptualisation of data*

My intention was to explore and see where that exploration took me. The intention was to gather the data and then to depict as is the convention in a heuristic method. The meanings attached to that process could not be planned for and the unfolding of the research process would reveal how the data could be conceptualised.

## *4. Systematic consideration of competing explanations/interpretations of the data.*

The research design allowed for a creative and evolving process. In this way decisions about how to explain and interpret data would be made when the time came.

However, there would be a willingness to take the data after depictions and to

consider it using another research method for data analysis, in line with the foundations established and philosophical view. Consistency in all methods of analysing data would be looked for before drawing conclusions from the results of the study.

Whatever my findings and tentative conclusions turn out to be I was aware of competing possibilities for the data in the research design and planned to offer a truth for the consideration of others

#### *5. Credibility of the researcher (reflexivity)*

I was aware when creating the research design that the thesis will be characterised by a core idea. That is that the self of the researcher was going to be prominent. The self-study was intended to form pivotal data for the heuristic study. I intended to be honest about the relationships I experienced with participants in a transparent way.

On a personal level, I planned to use journal extracts and to keep a journal as part of the process of gathering data. This would form a useful resource in acknowledging the reflexive nature of this study.

I planned to be honest and to reveal my own experiences of loss, knowing that this would probably be both painful and cathartic. I was conscious from the outset that this task of research would be very challenging for me on a personal level and wanted to chart my process and learn about myself in the process.

### 6. *Experiential authenticity of the material*

I knew from the outset that what I had to offer as data would be authentic. I also wanted to set up the interview process to enable the participants to be themselves as much as is possible in such a situation. I planned to use counselling skills in the interviews to help the participants to relax and to be able to explore the questions without threat and fear of judgement from me.

I intended to offer the participants copies of the transcripts to give opportunity for any material to be removed and for them to confirm the authenticity of the record of the interview.

I already had ethnographic material collected by myself and knew it to be authentic material

### 7. *Use of triangulation (including negotiation with informants/testimonial validity*

I intended within the design of this study to inform the participants of the possibility of my returning to the interviewees later with further depictions and analysis, if this seems appropriate. I decided that the decisions to do so or not would be taken in the light of the participants' wishes and reactions to the interview experience.

I planned to triangulated the study by analysing the data from the intended self-study and the data from the interviews in different ways, one as depictions as part of heuristic method and the other as analysis in an empirical phenomenological way.

The literature review was to be carried out after the results and used to evaluate the findings against current literature.

### *8. Catalytic Validity*

I hoped and planned in this research design that it would be a positive enriching experience for all the participants. Of course there may have been unforeseen happenings and feelings that could have resulted from the experience. I informed the participants that they could come back to me for debriefing sessions or see another counsellor if they so wished, should the experience of participation bring about difficulties after the interviews.

### *9. Replication*

It is in the nature of this kind of research that exact replication is not possible. However, in the research design I was conscious of looking for resonance in my own experiences of counselling and to turn to literature and the experiences of others to validate findings as they emerged. I was aware that the small-scale of the study and that whatever would be discovered would have to be validated without being repeated.



### **3. Being ethical in research design and process**

When I asked myself, 'What is an appropriate ethical context for my work'? I was aware that the ethical issues that could arise out of this research were similar to the way issues may arise in counselling practice. I was mindful that the research interviews could have triggered painful material for the research participants. I included myself in that too. Rowling's paper (1999) addresses the forgotten ethical issue of the needs of the researcher using qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews. She identifies self-reflexivity as a key skill for researchers in the field of loss and grief. With sensitivity to self, one can become aware of predicaments.

*'These include: the clash of ontological beliefs brought to the research; being a researcher and providing support; the interpersonal context of interviews, with their heightened affective component; and the dilemmas of the researcher's role of being 'in' or 'out' of the research'.* (Rowling, 1999 p.167)

Rowling suggest keeping a research journal and supervision as forms of debriefing. I kept a journal and wrote in it when so moved and set in place an excellent academic supervisor who is also a counsellor and counsellor educator. I had every confidence in her to offer the kind of supervision that Rowling speaks of. I was also aware that I knew not where I would end up going, as is the nature of this very risky research method when exploring sensitive material. Lincoln and Guba (1985) agree and assert that it is very difficult to predict risks in a naturalistic study because it is by nature emergent. As a researcher and counsellor I was aware that my own story revealed would have an affect of my own life. When I finished the writing of the thesis I went into deep and intensive therapy for some months. On reflection it felt as if I had

purged myself in the writing and got closer to my demons than ever before in my life and eventually turned to face them instead of fleeing. Consequently I am free of much anguish and pain associated with my own loss experience.

I knew that in the telling of my story my life could bring changes to my life.

Widdershoven (1993) elucidates,

*'By telling a story about our life, we change our life. As we do so, the story itself becomes richer, as it is filled with life experience. Thus experience and story are said to communicate with each other' (p.13)*

I also asked myself if what I was intending to do was in some way using participants own responses to work on my own loss material? Miller (1996) comments on the dialogue of the *I* and the *thou*. He argues that true dialogue is ethical.

*'I contend that it is in the dialogical, relational arena – in a symmetrical arena with a level playing field- that individual (and group) positions can be voiced, heard, and explored. In this light, then, the locus of the ethical perspective and decision is in the interplay of self and other- in the dialogue.' (p.131)*

I intended to make sure that the participants would feel comfortable to express themselves. Miller (1996) puts forward the idea that people, at times. Need to be and in fact wish to be listened to and heard. Having an attentive person to listen is welcomed by many. Buber (1970) created the notion that we discover ourselves in relationship to others. He further describes the idea that we learn about ourselves and

about other people through interrelating. He understands this as an instinctive human drive firstly to be with other people and then to converse and engage in dialogue.

Miller (1996) expands on the above by noting that many research participants found that taking part in the process of research helped them to reauthor their lives and they were creative in the way that they created new meanings for themselves.

It seems that there is much to be said for being a research participant and that the experience can lead to a reflexive process, almost inevitably. I was aware that in order for me to take risks and for the other participants to engage fully in the process I must ensure that the process of gathering the data be a beneficial one for all, to the best of my ability.

### **Ethical Consent**

In searching for a set of principles which I could follow to ensure that my research was ethical I came across the views of McLeod (1994). He states that at the base of all ethical issues in research is the concept of the abuse of power by the researcher (p.166). To protect the participants, it was vital for the research design to consider this issue, to gain informed consent and to maintain confidentiality.

The university ethics committee approved the research design for this study. (Please see copies of the blank consent forms signed by participants who were interviewed in Appendix 1)

The material gathered during practice as a play therapist was presented with permission from the parents of the children involved in therapy. Permission was sought before therapy was offered and parents of the children assured that access to the therapy was not dependent on taking part in the research element of the project set up by myself and a university colleague (also a Play therapist) in conjunction with Cruse Bereavement Care and the University of Durham to offer play therapy to bereaved children referred by CRUSE bereavement care and to research the practice for research and teaching purposes. (Please see copies of the blank consent forms in Appendix 2)

Ethnographic material gathered in personal diaries of the daily experience of primary school teaching is presented ensuring that the identities of the children concerned are protected by using false names and changing gender in some instances.

In addition, to the above, I was dedicated to monitoring the process as it unfolded and to deal with any ethical issues in consultation with my academic supervisor. I am a member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and adhere to The Framework for Ethical Decision Making (2000) designed by the organisation both for therapy and research. The basic ethical principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence, autonomy and fidelity (Kitchener, 1984) principles, derived from moral philosophy will be at the base of all decisions subsequently taken.

My research was cognisant of the following. I made sure that the participants were fully informed about the research procedures and the risks involved. This included knowledge about the process of being interviewed for a heuristic study, description of

any possible risks and information about how confidentiality would be ensured. Furthermore, a description of what I intend to do with the data derived. Each participant was given the choice to withdraw at any time during the study. I also offered a strategy for debriefing or counselling, if required at the end of the interview process. In addition the written contract was signed by both of us and a copy given to each participant.

I endeavoured to meet the criteria, designed by Lindsey (1984) to ensure genuine informed consent. That of: *'competence, provision of adequate information and voluntariness'*. (McLeod, 1994)

#### **4. Being reflexive as a researcher**

When I asked myself 'Where or who was I in the research?' I began by saying that I am fifty-one years old, a professional woman, a Counsellor and Play Therapist with fourteen years experience as a practitioner, a University Lecturer with eleven years experience of teaching Counselling at MA level. I am an experienced researcher and have a wealth of experience of supervising the MA dissertation research of many students. In taking up this study I knew I would be exposing myself by being honest and open about my own experience of loss. Indeed the study is driven by an internal struggle to come to terms with early separation, neglect and the life long resultant effort to be alongside those experiencing suffering as a result of loss. That is the intrapersonal context of my research. What I have learnt so far from the experience of being a researcher is that the process is both exciting and inspiring, that it involves a scholarly attention to detail, that it gave me opportunity to spread my wings and

explore the issues that have intrigued and fascinated me over the years in my therapeutic practice.

### **5. Enabling others to learn from the research**

How does my research speak beyond itself? I hope that the research will throw up issues, ideas and insights that will suggest implications for further investigation for broader areas of knowledge and practice of therapy. (E.g. theory, policy, practice) I had some ideas in the beginning about those but preferred to wait and see what the study indicated before discussing then in great detail. Counsellors working in the bereavement field and others in the process of loss experience with clients are aware that stuckness, depression, lack of confidence, feeling 'lost', all experiences common in those who come to counselling when experiencing loss can prevent satisfying daily living. My hunch was that this study may show that the 'lost' have capacities to become creative in relation to the loss and by 'doing their loss' in interaction, that they can manage their experience and self-heal. Therefore, the role of the counsellor would be to provide a relationship of psychological safety and permissiveness and be predisposed to encouraging 'creative acts'. The counsellor has the power to attend to ALL material brought by the client, movements, 'chit-chat', stories apparently unrelated. All aspects of life described, implied and 'invisible' are most important

How did the results of my research connect with other research? I wrote a chapter that looked at the outcomes of this study and I looked for connections with other theories and models of loss.

Where does my research end? Anybody working therapeutically may find this research helpful. The wider context could include those working in the caring professions. Both counsellor and client need awareness that being in the world and interacting with people, places and things may be the location for healing. It is my experience that it is within these interactions that the losses of life are located. This is but one of the possible ways of talking about loss and the counselling encounter. I did hope by the end of the study to be able say more about this and also other discoveries that were yet to be made.

What I do believe is that the depth of human suffering can be seen in the experience of loss and any idea that therapeutic techniques or medical intervention can solve the resultant feelings and reactions or any existent simple reductionist model can capture the experience is disrespectful to the sufferer. I hoped above all that this study would create a small spark in those who read it to come to know that the experience of loss touches all of us in many aspects of living our lives and that when human beings suffer deeply with feelings of loss there is no magic formula to employ. It is a process that is both universal and unique. I will feel satisfied if my study brings some of the complexity back into an area of human behaviour that has been simplified for those professionals who care for others in the models that are taught in training. My research ends with a set of discoveries that can be further investigated in a variety of ways.

### **Postscript- what actually happened in the process**

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter the creative process of research is about following where the process leads and the postscript describes something of the actual experience of the research process. My aim was to be puzzled, unsure and mistaken at times. In addition I was prepared to wait and see what evolved in the time and location of my quest to know more about the experience of loss. Below are my observations and experiences whilst on the journey.

The way I selected my research participants can be located within the examples given earlier on in this chapter. I wanted knowledgeable informants, a range of views, people with experience of loss, i.e. a purposive sample, hand-picked for the task. I set about considering how to find such people and life continued to happen. In this everyday world the participants began to emerge. I noticed something much more interesting than the text book examples of how to select participants occurring whilst getting on with living. I began to feel powerfully drawn to those I wanted to interview. I turn to the work of Joseph Goodbread (1997) to gain some understanding of it.

Goodbread (1997) asserts that below the level of normal social intercourse there are other kinds of relationships which hold an awesome power. They can transcend our power and our wishes. He says that they strike at the roots of awareness and consequently draw us into acts of radical intercourse. Goodbread (1997) argues that dreams and manifest reality co-create one another. Arnold Mindell (1982) coined the phrase ‘dreaming up’ to describe a unique kind of countertransference. This encapsulates the totality of feelings and reactions that a counsellor/therapist has



towards the client. Mindell (1982) also discovered that dreaming up could happen in any relationship. The participants would be affected by any relationship, in which dreaming has a role. It takes place below the layer of immediate awareness, in a world of nonverbal signs. The relationship can bind us in an unwilling but inescapable unity. When we appear in the dreams of another we tend to think of the representation in the dream as ourselves. This can change the way that we act towards the dreamer.

*'Just hearing a dream in which you figure is enough to 'dream you up' by changing your immediate mood and behaviour'. (Goodbread, 1997, p.30)*

One of my research participants *'dreamt me up'*. He was a person who I came into contact with on a daily basis. We had only spoken once before I approached him and invited him to participate in the research. I was drawn to do this when I overheard him say to another. *'This is the woman in my dream'*. In addition I sensed something about him. I sensed him living in mourning. Francis Spufford, literary critic, reviewed *Darwin's Worms* (1999) a book written by Adam Philips in the London Evening Standard, saying *'Darwin's Worms is a moral essay written to warn us'*. He elucidated on this point.

*'In this world in which everything vanishes in the end, and everyone eventually has losses to mourn, the great temptation, says Adam Philips, is to seize on mourning itself as the one permanent thing, and to try to use regret to stop time.'* (Spufford, Thursday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1999)

The consequent interview revealed multiple losses and a life characterised by transience and a sensitive and hurt human being, still locked into the losses of the past. Indeed his mourning appeared to be the one permanent thing in his life. So, we chose each other for the interview.

Another research participant became interested in volunteering to be interviewed after attending a research seminar, in which I explained my aims and purpose for this research. He held up a pen telling me that the loss of his mother at age 21 was located in this pen. It was her present to him for his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. After the seminar he sent me a letter asking if he could be of any help in the process. I offered an interview. The result was an interview that brought us together and finally resulted in a jointly authored paper on the complexity of grief, which took some months to write. Here again I believe we chose each other.

My third research participant was selected because I believed she would feel free to talk. I knew her to be open, articulate and creative and to have experienced major losses. She is the only counsellor interviewed. This felt very much like me selecting her. The resultant interview had less of an emotional impact on me and I was reluctant to transcribe it. I even at one point thought of discarding it. The first two were transcribed within 24 hours of the interviews taking place. With this last participant I eventually arranged for a third party to transcribe it. This tells me something important about the process of selecting participants. I believe that being in the world and waiting patiently for a process to unfold resulted in two participants that engaged in the process at a much deeper level. When we selected each other, we were both there as equal participants in the collection of the data. Both interviews were

emotionally charged experiences for both participants. By comparison the last was lukewarm and surface and I found myself emotionally detached from it.

In two cases the participants gained new understandings and spoke of the powerful nature of the interview experience. All participants were able to speak for some considerable time with the eight question semi-structure and the additional enabling relationship formed during the interviews. The topic was evocative and the intimacy of the interview led to great interest in the transcripts from the two participants that were identified as emotionally charged from the onset. The two welcomed copies of the transcripts within days and the impact of reading them was noted. The interview data was collected over five years ago and I have allowed the experience of it to enter my world alongside the ending of my marriage of twenty-eight years and the death of my youngest brother at thirty-four years, from a rare bone-marrow disease. These two major experiences of loss in my own life have swirled around and absorbed me intensely. The depictions and illuminations that are presented later in the study have grown from the formal research experience and my everyday life. Sela-Smith, (2002) asserts that heuristic research to fulfil dissertation requirements can lead to a possibility.... *'that the researcher may not be intimately and autobiographically connected to the question'* (p. 66) She argues that an institutional concern could cause the researcher not to be fully immersed in the experience. In my case I would defend myself by stating that this experience of researching heuristically has been part of my life for some time. Due to the two losses described I was unable to focus on writing but have been raw and exposed to the loss experience both first hand and through the data generated from the study. The phase of incubation has also been a vivid time in my life. Due to my own experiences of loss I have retreated from the intense focus on

the experience of loss for periods of time over the last five years. Sela-Smith (2002) stated that this is not a planned stage it just occurs when the,

*... 'unconscious processing part of the self needs to sort through, consider, review, and re-organise new ways of thinking, being, seeing, and understanding, to create meaning and form an answer to the question. ' (p.67)*

The explication phase happened to me in a kind of rush. For some time I found it difficult to articulate my new awarenesses. It was in conversation that they began to form.

*'The reorganisation that has taken place on the deep- conscious level during incubation is now occurring in waking consciousness in the explication. ' (Sela-Smith, 2002 p.68)*

### ***The creative synthesis is born***

As I write this the form of the creative synthesis is becoming brighter. It started as a conversation with a friend about the pain of separation. This friend spoke of a film he had produced as a Television Producer for a series called '*The Human Race*', filmed with Desmond Morris. He described the piece of film to me. It involved building a hide and filming at Heathrow Airport as people were saying goodbye to loved ones. When editing the film he described the tears of those involved in the editing process. This story of the making of the film and the imagined film itself as he described the embracing, tears, sadness and forlornness of the activity in the airport lounge has not left me and he has offered me a copy of the short film extract to go with this text. The

images will speak for themselves. Sela-Smith (2002) speaks of others experiencing the story, in whatever form, and resonating in deep agreement. I await other creative ideas when I reach the time.

### ***After the heuristic Process is complete***

What has happened to my research questions- have they been answered, changed, revised, and transformed? Have they thrown up other questions? At some point I decided to use the illuminations from self-dialogue to analyse the transcripts from the other research participants for evidence of these themes and meanings of the experience of loss. I have also identified some life styles from the transcripts and consequent depictions. In other words I was interested to see if the experience of loss can in some way lead to a lifestyle in which there is a continual working and re-working of the experience of loss. I took the material available and wrote about the concept of lifestyle in relation to the accounts of life described in the co-constructed interviews.

The chapter on children also developed and was added to the pot of data for further consideration.

The process of seeking and connecting discoveries with those that happened along the way continued to develop and grow throughout the study. At this point I will leave this chapter and come back to the method and its process as it unfolded.

## Chapter 3

### RESULTS

#### Heuristic study

##### How do I perceive and describe my experience of loss?

Moustakas (1990, p.16) writes of Rogers (1969) and his ideas, as to the essential qualities of discovery and he says that one must be open to one's experience and trust in one's own self awareness and understanding. Also it is important to work from an internal locus of evaluation and he writes of the importance and willingness of the researcher to enter into a process rooted in the self. Like Moustakas, I was willing to be open and to be receptive to my own experience of loss. I was willing to allow comprehension and compassion to mingle and to also recognise that intellect, emotion and spirit are in union. So, I planned to move from the individual, me, to the general and back, from feelings to words and back and from experience to concepts and back. This backwards and forwards process formed the process of my learning about loss. I moved from my knowledge of loss to what is known generally. I allowed myself to feel the loss in order to identify the words and then go back to my feelings about them. I wrote of my experiences of loss and looked at the concepts related to those and then back to the experiences again.

Moustakas (1990) argues that a preliminary awareness of one's own knowledge and experience of a critical life issue is a phenomenon for enabling the beginning of a study. So, I began to write for this chapter on the self with the intention of being open

to my awareness. I hoped that self knowledge would help me to understand more fully the experience of loss and in the end, more deeply.

*'As the inquiry expands such self-knowledge enables one to develop the ability and skill to understand the problem more fully and ultimately to deepen and extend understanding through the eyes and voices of others' (Moustakas, 1990, p.17)*

I agree with Maslow (1966) when he says that

*'There is no substitute for experience, none at all. All the other paraphernalia of communication and of knowledge - words, labels, concepts, symbols, theories, formulas, sciences – all are useful only because people already know them experientially. (pp 45-46)*

So, self –dialogue can lead to a body of knowledge that grows out of direct human experience. It can be discovered and explicated through self-inquiry. I was willing to explore my own experience of loss as it is clear that at the heart of heuristic inquiry there is a belief in the value of disclosure and the valuing of tacit knowledge.

In this chapter I had to be honest with myself and write of my own experience. So, I asked myself the question, *what do I do when I experience loss?* I have thought a lot about loss in my life and read a fair amount about it. I wanted my own disclosure to facilitate the learning gained. I asked myself the same eight questions I planned to ask later of my co-researchers. In addition, I engaged in dialogue with myself. I wrote spontaneously as **Kathryn** and I question my words as **Kathryn Frances**. It was my

intention to respond and to extend my thinking as I wrote. I was going to immerse myself in the topic of loss. It was a way for me to enter into this topic and dig deeply into my own experience.

Below follows the dialogue as it emerged in the process described. It is presented as a depiction of my self.

### ***How the material was analysed and presented***

The following section is depicted as raw unedited dialogue & 11 themes (moments of illumination) identified from within the text after period of immersion in the data and time spent in incubation.

#### **1. What do I know about the experience of loss?**

**Kathryn:** I feel I know a lot about the experience of loss. I can trace my loss experiences back to childhood. I experienced painful feelings of loss when separated from my mum, dad and younger brother at the age of three years. I was cared for by relatives and I know that I was neglected and witnessed domestic violence whilst in their care. At the age of six years a house move brought about a change of school and the familiar feelings of isolation and despair came back in my new environment. I would say that I was not good at change and my early experience had taken away a sense of myself as adaptable and strong in new situations. I also experienced the loss of my family again at age eight years when I was hospitalised in isolation. In addition to the painful separation at that time, I experienced a loss of health and mobility due to a neurological condition that caused my lower body to become paralysed. Later at



the age of eleven years I was once again separated from my family when sent to stay with a family in France. I was isolated in a foreign land with a family who spoke no English and did not acknowledge my deep pain at the separation, expressed in silent tears at meal times. It seems to me that each time the loss occurred, it tapped into the previous losses and the well of deep isolation and despair became deeper.

Loss in later life seems to me to be very strongly linked to these early childhood losses.

Throughout my teenage years and my early adult life I would say that I did not feel significant losses. When I try to understand it I would say that I avoided deep attachment. If I did not become attached then I could not experience the pain of loss with the possible breaking of the attachment. I fell in love with a man that did not return the love and the fantasy attachment remained part of my life for more than thirty years. It was not a 'real' relationship. I hardly knew the person. As I write this I am aware that I am discovering something important about myself. Whilst I was in love with him then no other relationship could be as powerful. Thus, I protected myself from 'real' feelings in my everyday life. What I know about my loss in early childhood is that it seems to have prevented me from developing intimate relationships in adult life. This happened for many years and it is only in the last year that I have begun to live with intimacy in a close relationship. So, what changed? Fifteen years ago my younger brother took his own life. Stephen's suicide is a turning point in my personal history. As I write this the pain is as raw today as it was then. My whole world collapsed. I was devastated by my loss of him. I could not remember a day when he was not in my life and the dark hole left by him has but the thinnest of skin covering it. At anytime I can be cast into it with or without warning and feel

myself clamouring to get out and the tear in the cover taking time to heal. After Stephen died this exploration began. I write it down today after being immersed in it for the last fifteen years. I have read, written, spoken and worked amongst the bereaved in my capacity as a counsellor. Further losses include the death of my father, Arthur, and my youngest brother Michael. In addition my relationship with my husband, John, of more than thirty years has been severed by my own hand. In a brutal and violent separation I left a marriage in which I feared my husband. I was in control of this loss and the transformation in my life is remarkable.

So, I feel that loss is something of a theme in my life. The journey I am on in understanding it and making sense of my life in relation to it is compelling. I do not feel that it has been a choice. I need to understand why I have had the difficulties that I have had in relationships and I am curious about the fact that I have difficulty with intimacy in personal relationships and then choose to work as a counsellor with clients in a practice which by its very nature can be described as intimate. When I first became a counsellor and before my brother Stephen died I would have said that I wanted to become a counsellor so that I could 'put something back into society', because people naturally come to me and share their worries and troubles, because I have an interest in mental health. Now, after much lived experience in the role and greater self awareness, due to client work, teaching and research involving the heuristic journey I would say that I am a counsellor because I experienced significant losses in my early life. Loss appears to be central to my counselling work with bereaved adults and children. It has been central and a burning passion in my research and writing activities. It has played a major part in my accepting a marriage that was abusive and stifling. It has been the catalyst for my leaving my marriage and

beginning a new and more peaceful life, in which I have grown into myself with greater confidence.

***Kathryn Frances:** So, I have listened to you speaking about what you know about the experience of loss. You seem to have some belief in the idea that what happened to you as a child has been hugely influential in determining the course of your adult life. You also note that the losses in your life have had a cumulative effect and are life long in their impact on your daily life. In addition, you would say that your adult life appears to be dominated by the theme of loss. Is this the case?*

**Kathryn:** Yes, I believe that I would have been a different kind of person if I had not had to undergo the separations and subsequent loss experiences in childhood. I am sure that loss experience opens up previous pain and sometimes the pain is so familiar and ancient in my knowing about it. As a child I did not connect these experiences and at one point I was seen by an educational psychologist in order to unravel my deep sadness at the age of seven years.

I also believe that my brother taking his own life at age 33 years has been left me with a legacy that I cannot escape. I will always carry it like a huge burden. It has good outcomes and bad. I feel I do not fear it and that enables me to address it with clients. I also believe that it is a special kind of loss and it feels very different from the loss of my brother Michael, who also died young at 34 years, with a rare disease. I feel not only the loss of Stephen but also the weight of responsibility. I carry some of the blame. He was my baby brother and it was my job to take care of him and I let him down. I let him down at the time he needed me the most. So I suppose I know about guilt in relation to loss.

**Kathryn Frances:** *I hear what you are saying and I want to argue with you about it. I want to say that the person who chooses to die is the one responsible for the death. I also know that it is pointless to say this because you have some peace now about your part in his death and have come to accept that you have a part to play in his life and therefore a part to play in his death.*

**Kathryn:** I do believe that suicide is a special kind of loss and from it have learnt that sometimes people need to have their guilt accepted in order to move on. I have accepted it in my clients after much struggle to find that once it is accepted then the client can live with a degree of peace and therapeutic movement is usually evident.

## **2. What qualities or dimensions of the experience of loss stand out for me?**

**Kathryn:** The most important one would be the sense of isolation, experiencing a feeling of being totally alone in the world. This would include a feeling of being trapped and powerless to do anything about it. A dread of waking in the morning to know that the day ahead would be yet another day of sadness, pining and darkness. Even though on the surface I would appear OK, underneath the façade there would be deep, deep distress. I am aware of the bubbling up of tears at inappropriate and inconvenient times.

**Kathryn Frances:** *It sounds very sad this living in an inner world whilst operating in an outer one. Was it not possible to communicate how you felt to anyone?*

**Kathryn:** It felt impossible to communicate my feelings to anyone. I feared that if I did I would be stopping others from living. My husband was tired of my grief and communicated this and his fear that I had come from a family where one member had chosen to kill himself. Therefore, he identified me as dangerous and not to be trusted in making decisions about the lives of our children. He said that from now on he would have to take over all such decisions to protect the children. I felt stigmatised, lost, destroyed and ashamed of being such a danger. I was weak and the effort of dragging my body through the day took up all of my energy. I had none left for defending myself. I felt another nail hammered into my hand as I joined our saviour in interminable suffering.

The rest of my family seemed to be getting along and only my father showed sign of cracks appearing in the veneer when he had his first heart attack two years after Stephen's death. The Christmas that followed was miserable for all. On Christmas morning my mother kept us waiting at the lunch table whilst she hosed down the back yard. The children were not the focus of love and joy for their Grandparents. My father sat in his dressing gown, ashen with grief and illness. The meal was awful. Not prepared with love and care and I had reached the bottom of the pit of despair. There was nowhere for me to turn. I had seen the sign in my home town for a counselling 'drop in' centre for the bereaved. I desperately wanted to 'drop in' there. I passed the door backwards and forwards many times and did not make it over the door step. I will never forget how difficult it was to ask for help and when I meet new clients for the first time I think about my reticence and consider the possibility that the client may well have felt the need to communicate for a long time before asking for help.

Eventually, some time later when I had embarked on counsellor training the personal development group gave me an opportunity to experience a powerful feeling. Sadness and my grief spilled out onto the floor of the group like a bubbling brook, carried for years, hidden with shame. The response was overwhelming. The acceptance of my deep sadness beneath the sunny disposition and competent scholarly image was a profound relief. Acceptance in its simplicity was the key to my accepting my self and feeling my pain. A group member offered me counselling and sessions were powerful and profound. One session was followed by repeated vomiting and I felt as if the huge lump of pain and unacceptable feelings were jettisoned and I began to feel lighter.

**Kathryn Frances:** *Was this isolation and deep sadness familiar to you when experiencing the loss?*

As a child I can remember the tears and the loneliness of my grief, a feeling of being out of kilter with the rest of humanity. I felt odd and did not relate how I felt to preceding events. Nobody knew what was wrong with me and neither did I. I felt different, inadequate, too sensitive and living inside my head a lot of the time. As an adult I knew why I felt so sad I just couldn't move. I was stuck in deep despair and the fear was that exposing myself would cause me to fall apart in a way that would make it impossible to get myself back together again. I feared disintegrating into my pain. The never-endingness of my pain made it unbearable at times and relief from it was longed for. The psychological pain at times so unbearable that only death seemed to be the way out of it. I am aware of a lack of ability to communicate how I felt and indeed questioned the appropriateness of my feelings and felt ashamed of my tears and inability to cope with changes in my life.

On the everyday level I struggled with my loss and in my dream world I was finding a way of accepting my loss of Stephen. I can remember having dreams that I was meeting up with Stephen and being so delighted to see him, only to wake and find it all to be untrue. I dreamt of him in his perfect world, surrounded by laughter, his dead son, natural beauty and working with wood, a love of his life. I also dreamt of a chance meeting in the street during which we discussed the fact that he was dead. This was the last dream I had of him. I collected every photograph that I had of him and placed them in a brown envelope. On the front I wrote his name. From time to time I had the sensation that my hair was being stroked. When it happened I started to speak with Stephen and to ask him if he was Ok and to ask him what he wanted. I wrote an MA dissertation about the search for the truth of Stephen's suicide. I saw Stephen in the eyes of a potential lover. I was drawn into the deep brown eyes. It felt as if my grief was located in his eyes and all I had to do was to dive into them to tackle it. I began a new line of discovery. Grief was not just inside me, hidden and isolated, I had seen it in the eyes of another. I questioned the idea of a skin boundary to the self. Perhaps if the self is located in interaction rather than in the head then grief is in there too. I began to realise that this experience of loss was never going to completely disappear. I was feeling better and yet as is the case today the smallest reminder, music, a scent of after-shave, a missed birthday card purchasing experience can open up the pain. Perhaps the idea of pathology in relation to life long grief should be questioned. What if grief could be seen as permanent and not pathological? For example, we all have a grieving self that can be activated at any time. The grieving self would contain the raw pain the cumulative store of pain through loss and when needed, would be present and ready to take part in the process of making sense of the loss in a timeless dimension of the developing self of the host body. I started to find

some inner peace as I explored these phenomena, as experienced. I learnt of David Grove and his work with metaphor therapy. I thought of Carl Rogers and his idea of the wisdom of the client. If the client is wise and the client can create metaphors that contain the power to heal, then maybe the individual, in grief, locates the grief in interaction with others, with places and with objects with the possibility of becoming healed in the process of interaction.

***Kathryn Frances:** You have thought about many things and you have read the books on bereavement theory and explored the literature on loss. This may have helped you to feel a bit more in control. You have identified a kind of spiritual experience and talked of your dream world. What of relationships? Did you see a change in how you could relate to others?*

I have always been able to make good close relationships with women friends. I have had difficulty in relating to men intimately. In my youth, the fact that I felt unable to achieve intimacy in close relationships with men at a psychological level caused me to explore intimacy in a sexual way. I could take part in intimate acts without being fully present. This has caused me to question whether or not I was abused whilst in the care of relatives when very young. I appear to have been capable of dissociating from deeply intimate experiences of a sexual nature since my adolescence and it is only in recent times that I have begun to feel and to be present in sexual intimacy. Early loss experiences resulted in my feeling unsafe in the world, of being fearful of change, for many years unable to make satisfying deep personal attachments and this adversely effected relationships I had with men. I began to question the relationship with my husband and previously denied experience became conscious due to



counselling and deep personal exploration after the death of my brother. It would be another fourteen years before I could leave my marriage but the dismantling of the conditions of worth surrounding me had begun. My grief had left me no choice but to address my deep sadness and to explore my piled up and unexamined losses. In doing so and with further experiences of losing my father and my brother Michael, with the grief work surrounding those losses, I began to shed the inauthentic self I had become to find an emerging more authentic self, closer to the organasmic self than I had ever been since birth.

### **3. What examples of loss are vivid and alive?**

**Kathryn:** At the moment I am very conscious of the loss of my brother, Michael and the loss of my 'old life'. I call it my 'old life' and that it is my life when I was married and living with my former husband.

If I think about my Michael first, I am aware that it is only just over a year since he died and I am also aware that Michael's illness and subsequent death were highly relevant in my leaving my old life behind. We spoke together about the importance of living in the moment of our experience. When Michael realised the extent of the damage to his major organs caused by the illness, he realised that if he was going to survive then only a stem cell transplant would save him. I was tested and found to be a perfect match for his stem cells. It was a profound experience to realise that he and I were made of the same stuff. Not only was he my baby brother, whom I saw 15 minutes after his birth, whom I held and looked into his blurry eyes and welcomed him into the world, he was also grown from stem cells with identical coating to mine.

Although Michael was breathless and had severe damage to his heart muscle, kidneys, liver, lungs, spleen, and skin he was undaunted in his desire to be out in the world. It was autumn and he bought a map of his local area, a beautiful part of Wiltshire. He spent a whole day walking about 1 mile. He walked and stopped to recuperate and then walked on. His body was weak from damage and the effects of chemotherapy. I was due to visit and he asked me to bring walking gear and planned some short walks for us to do together. It was exhilarating to be in his presence. He was looking at everything on that beautiful golden autumn morning like he had never seen it all before. I felt a lump in my throat as I watched him struggle for breath and make the slow trek up small hilly tracks. This was a man who had been a soldier, won medals for his cross-country running, had been capable of surviving in the Brecon Beacons in January without food or shelter provided. As we walked together that morning I felt the strength of his determination and we spoke about the beauty of it all. He told me that he had been so busy in his life. In the last year as an international computer trouble shooter and trainer he had travelled to sixteen countries, Europe, USA, Middle East and Australia and he had not had time to stop and appreciate the beauty in his own home county. On this particular morning he planned for us to visit an iron-age fort. The fort was large and we decided to walk the perimeter of the site. As we were walking we heard a thudding sound on the ground. Within a few minutes we were close to the camber of the walls when we saw two fallow deer running very fast across our path. They were so close they almost touched us. We stopped and gasped at the beauty of it. 'Wow!' came from Michael. He was so close to it all. He knew his chances of survival were very slim. He was going to fight to live and I was witnessing something moving and inspiring. I was blown away by this meeting with Michael and I began to question my own courage to face my life head on.

I had been living in a state of sadness for some time. My former husband had told me that he was facing an inspection at work and if it turned out badly then that would be the end of us. I woke one morning and got into the shower. I cried and sobbed in a deep and exhausting episode and for the first time ever did not go into work I had never felt so lonely and I realised that I was holding together a marriage that was not built on love and respect. I had sold out. I had settled for something that was beginning to crack and fall.

Within a very short time I had a chance meeting with a man who touched my shoulder with such tenderness that it caused me to weep. He fell in love with me and I began a two year relationship with him in which I was adored and loved in a way that I had never known. It is strange that I include this experience here as a loss. I do so because from the beginning it was never going to be anything but. I knew it. I thought I was in love with him too but later I realised it was just so lovely to be held and cared for and at times I felt euphoric. There were negative elements that could have developed further and I never felt completely safe with him. Sexually I was still locked up in myself. The sexual side of the relationship was important to him but not to me. I just wanted the tenderness that accompanied it. But, the change had begun, the metamorphosis was beginning. The man had shown me quite clearly that there was another way to live. Both Michael and my new lover were showing me the beauty of life and I knew that I would lose both of them soon and I did. Michael died the following summer and my lover and I separated some months before. It would be some time until all the communication ceased. He wanted always to have me in his life and I knew that it was time to face the ending of my marriage alone.

The marriage separation was traumatic and violent and I feared for my physical safety in it. I have never missed my former husband. I had left him emotionally many years before. I remember the violence and the fear. I am beginning to remember some of the happy times now nineteen months on. Then, I experienced the deep sadness and feelings of despair I have described earlier. All that old loss experience was activated yet again and I held my body in the loneliness of an empty bed at night and the pain was physical and unbearable. Sometimes I would write my thoughts down in a heated rush, spewing them onto the page. Other times I would whine and cower in the corner of my room until the impact of the bolt had gone. I was exhausted and wretched. On the outside people complimented me on how well I looked. I held down my job, of a fashion. My office became chaotic with piles of paper and unopened post. My grip on it all was tenuous. Six weeks after leaving my home Michael died.

**Kathryn Frances:** *I feel quite overwhelmed by this gushing story. It seems connected and yet not connected and I know that it is constructed and misses much out. There is also a continual process of editing happening. The experiences that stand out are the walk in Wiltshire with Michael, Michael's death, the love affair and the separation from your former husband and the painful loneliness that followed all three of these losses within a few months of each other. The potential loss of Michael and the beauty of living in the moment with him, tempered by the lover and his tenderness cause you to change your life and the change was enormous, monumental. You wrote earlier that this was a loss you were in control of. You chose to leave your old life and to start again with a new one. Was it important to you that you did this alone? Some people leave a marriage by finding a new partner to go to.*

**Kathryn:** It was most important to me to be brave, not to leave my old life to run to the shelter of another. However, once I did leave I was very tempted to become involved in a new marriage, to be taken care of because of the terrible emotional pain that was consuming me. The man I believed I had been in love with for most of my adult life suggested we become a pair and I gave it consideration. In that desperate time when I struggled to see the light at the end of the tunnel it was such an appealing thought. However, I soon realised that I had invented this love to find some intimate experience, be it a fantasy or not it had helped me to survive. Now, I didn't need it. I could be alone in the world and survive it. All my losses had shown me that life was there to be grabbed and lived and I didn't need to rely on another for my inner security. I was beginning to become strong. Shortly after Michael died I began to develop a deeper friendship with a man I had known for many years. In this relationship I have become myself. I am accepted, not frightened, respected and loved and it has helped me to find inner resources. Today I am able to write this and to know that I can experience intimacy and that I can embrace the moment. Loss has taught me about the meaning of closeness and human intimacy. I am beginning to feel now. I have felt love and expressed it, I have felt sadness and expressed it and more recently anger and expressed it. This feels healthy to me and for the first time in my life I am at peace with myself.

#### **4. What events, situations, and people are connected with the experience of loss?**

**Kathryn:** I have noticed that I interact with people, places and objects. This is what I would describe as living. Even when I am inside my head, there is an internal

dialogue. Human experience feels to me to be located in interaction. One thing I am aware of is that the loss is located in interaction.

I have interacted with others and in so doing I have healed my loss. The grief is not just inside me it's also without me and active in the space between me and others. I have seen my grief in the eyes of another. I have had relationships and episodes with people in which I feel the loss experience is active. I have been counselled with the aim of interacting with my loss experience. Counselling feels to me to be but one way of interacting to heal loss. Many others occur spontaneously

Roberta Flack sings a song called, 'Killing me softly' the lyrics of the song describe listening to a young man playing guitar and singing. She describes him as 'strumming my fate with his fingers and singing my life with his words'. The popular song feels to me to be a location for my grief. At times when I was in deep pain after a loss I could not listen to music or to songs due to the intense experience of the interaction. 'Killing me softly' describes this pain so well. So grief is located in songs and in books, novels, films, poems, paintings, photographs. When I interact with any of these I believe that healing of my own grief is happening.

Moving a photograph from one place to another can be an expression of loss. Seeing a photograph on a mantelpiece for months followed by a move to a less central location in a room such as the top of another piece of furniture, off centre, shows the process of letting go of the lost one. I was witness to such events and caused a premature intervention to this process, causing the person to move the photograph from sight. The outcome is that the photograph is now faced down behind the sofa in the room.

The owner seems both unable to move it and unable to display it. I believe that I have interfered with the process of this loss. I believe that what people do with photographs to be very important in the healing process of loss. I once counselled a young girl who cried about the day her wedding picture would be replaced by the picture of another marriage after the death of her husband. She knew one day it would happen and she needed to mourn it. I think it interesting that I do not display any photographs of my former husband and wonder at the lack of it.

Also grief is located in places. I have had strong urges to visit certain places when in grief. The place holds the grief and when I arrive it is vivid and alive for me. Some time after Michael died I drove down from Durham to Wiltshire and as I drove into his home town to visit my Mother I felt the tears bubble up and out and the intensity of the grief experience was strong. The small Wiltshire town will always be a place of interaction for me. During my 20 sessions of art therapy as a client I explored many themes. Some of the themes involved places, fantasy places that I drew that were locations for my losses. I do not know the meaning of the metaphors I chose but I do know that they have enabled me to interact with my loss and to become healed in the process.

**Kathryn Frances:** *Do you remember the paintings you saw in Prague by Jakub Schikaneder (1855- 1924)? You were stopped in your tracks by them. You had to go back into the room and look at them again. You were compelled to track him down on the internet and learn about his life. The painting dealt with such deep emotional issues and the painting of a drowned woman spoke to you so closely.*

**Kathryn:** The drowned woman spoke to me from the painting. She lay on the beach, washed up and motionless. That was me, washed up and motionless. I had survived the drowning. I had been drowning for a long time. I never thought I would be washed up on the beach. The difference between me and her is that I survived. Sometimes I am not sure how much intact. At times I feel strong and other times like now I feel vulnerable, alone wet and lying on the sand with hushed voices around me.

**Kathryn Frances:** *Is this the attraction for you of art, music and literature? Do you see yourself in them? Can you locate your loss experiences in them?*

**Kathryn:** No, I am attracted and then only sometimes this collision occurs between me and some music or a song or a poem or a painting and I feel my loss located in the interaction and I know something is happening in the experience. I feel compelled to listen to the music repeatedly or I read the poem repeatedly. In the gallery in Prague I had to keep returning to the room with Schikaneder's paintings and the painting of the drowned woman on the beach was the focus. This happened when I was nearing the first anniversary of my separation.

##### **5. What feelings and thoughts are generated by the experience of loss?**

**Kathryn:** Mainly, I have feelings of emptiness and isolation. It feels like I am behind a very strong, high grey wall and it is impossible for others to reach me. I think of my life as temporary and insignificant and also have thoughts of dying myself at times.



I think I am rather pre-occupied with the idea of loss and it is only in recent times that I have been able to articulate it. Threats of future loss can feel very painful. I can easily be moved to tears by the thought of another loss.

*Kathryn Frances: It sounds as if you are quite vulnerable and have had enough loss for now.*

**Kathryn:** Yes, that sounds right and as I hear myself say it I realise that loss is part of life and inevitable. I am not going to be able to be attached to anyone without the fear of loss. It's the other side of the coin if I love I have to live with possibility of loss. I do feel battered by it and would like the world to stop and give me assurances. My expectations are unreal.

#### **6. What bodily states or shifts in bodily presence occur in the experience of loss?**

**Kathryn:** In acute loss experience, I am aware of physical pain in my chest, constriction in my breathing and pain in my head, particularly behind my eyes. In the past I have felt nauseous, experienced vomiting and felt generally unwell. There is sometimes an anxiety kind of reaction in which I feel shocked and unable to rest. I have also felt hands on my head from time to time, as if my hair is being stroked. I have also felt a tightening around my head like a band around my forehead being tightened.

**7. What time and space factors affect my awareness and meaning of the experience of loss?**

**Kathryn:** I do feel that time heals pain, although, sometimes the pain of a past loss can feel just as great some years later. The overall progress of time and life events eases the pain of the past. If I find myself in a space that rekindles the loss then it can feel very fresh. I believe that buildings and natural spaces hold the loss experience within them. Churches and historical buildings can carry centuries of mourning and loss within them.

**Kathryn Frances:** *Are you saying this is mystical in some way?*

**Kathryn:** It is something to do with sacred space. There are spaces both physical and non-physical where significant loss can be felt and sensed.

**8. Have I shared all the significant ingredients or constituents of the experience of loss?**

**Kathryn:** Yes, I think so. Maybe just to say that my work as a counsellor has led me to understand that grief is idiosyncratic in nature and that theory about it is by its nature reductionism and therefore simplistic. The models available are useful and allow me to understand the stage process of grieving. What I do feel is that any wisdom from the mourner's point of view in knowing how to be and what to do is not acknowledged. The client in counselling is pathologised if the grief is long and complicated. I would like to argue that grief is idiosyncratic, life long, a healing



process in which the mourner is active in 'grief work' when, for example, watching TV, reading a novel, involved in a love affair, friendship, putting a photograph into a frame or wallet, listening to music, talking, having sex, walking in an environment, visiting a place. The list is endless because it involves all human activity. The experience is much more than an intrapersonal one. It is interpersonal, physical, spiritual and intercultural too.

### **What now?**

I come to a point now where I am reflecting on my initial engagement with this question i.e. 'What do people do when they experience loss?' . There has been an inner search that has been facilitated by self-dialogue. It does feel like a passionate concern, an intense interest. I have reached a stage of tacit awareness and knowledge I have been living in this question for some years. I have counselled the bereaved, taught about loss and counselling, written academic papers, presented at conferences and become known for my work on loss. With the writing down of my inner exploration and the most recent losses in my life I feel within this world of loss and yet strangely in co-existence with this inner journey I am aware of a need to stay separate, to keep safe and not to open up old wounds. Immersion in this question has been deep and long and the writing offers a respite. After a night's sleep and activities which offer retreat from this subject I am aware of some distance between me and the material produced so far. I look at my self-dialogue transcript and am shocked by it. It's long and personal and exposing. I am conscious of being in the third stage of the heuristic model, the stage of Incubation. I have engaged initially with the question, have immersed myself for some fourteen years in personal and professional working life and now reach a safe place. I am in retreat. The hatches are battened down and I

am spending some time on other things. It is familiar, this feeling of detachment from involvement. It has happened many times over the years. The spontaneous self-dialogue gets tucked away, the self-searching is hazy as a memory, I have made good use of the energy and the knowledge gained in the tacit dimension of my life for this subject, both in my work as a counsellor and as a human being stretching forward to heal the losses of my life. Moustakas (1990) would have placed me on the map of heuristic research in the stage of incubation at this point in the self exploration. The heuristic model of six stages, initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis is the method I have chosen to structure this research. Over the years there have been moments of illumination and I will seek to identify them. For it is these moments of illumination which modify old understanding. It may be a synthesis of fragmented knowledge or it may be a discovery of something present for some time but without immediate awareness.

*'In illumination, it is just such missed, misunderstood, or distorted realities that make their appearance and add something essential to the truth of an experience'*

(Moustakas, 1990, p.30)

Sacks (1985) writes of this experience of illumination in the story of 'Rebecca'. He makes a neurological assessment of her and finds her unable to achieve very much. Then on seeing her outside the hospital on a beautiful spring day he learns something else about her, missed in his routine carrying out of assessments. It is when he is not thinking about her capabilities at all, in another environment he sees the creative beauty she harbours.

*'When I first saw her-clumsy, uncouth, all-of-a-fumble-I saw her merely, or wholly, as a casualty, a broken creature, whose neurological impairments I could pick out and dissect with precision : a multitude of apraxias and agnosias, a mass of sensorimotor impairments and breakdowns, limitations of intellectual schemata and concepts similar (by Piaget's criteria) to those of a child of eight. A poor thing, I said to myself, with perhaps a 'splinter skill', a freak gift, of speech; a mere mosaic of higher cordial functions, Piagetian schemata- most impaired.*

*The next time I saw her, it was all very different. I didn't have her in a test situation, 'evaluating' her in a clinic. I wandered outside, it was a lovely spring day, with a few minutes in hand before the clinic started, and there I saw Rebecca sitting on a bench, gazing at the April foliage quietly, with obvious delight. Her posture had none of the clumsiness which had so impressed me before. Sitting there in a light dress, her face calm and slightly smiling, she suddenly brought to mind one of Chekov's young women -Irene, Anya, Sonya, Nina- seen against the backdrop of a Chekovian cherry orchard. She could have been any young woman enjoying a beautiful spring day. This was my human, as opposed to my neurological, vision. ' (Sacks, 1985, p.171)*

### **Moments of Illumination**

The following list is raw and is extracted from the material generated through the self-dialogue in answering the eight questions on loss experience. I will attempt to identify and list all 11 such illuminations classed as discoveries, in relation to loss, made over the years of my life.

***What do people do when experiencing a loss?***

*We:*

- Form fantasy attachments
- Create fantasy places and inhabit them
- Communicate with objects, images and sounds
- Experience difficulty with intimacy in personal relationships
- Live in an inner world whilst operating in an outer one
- Feel out of kilter with the rest of humanity
- Find ways to accept the loss in our dream worlds
- Seek spiritual knowledge and become spiritually sensitive
- Seek asylum
- Begin to dismantle the conditions of worth. There is a desire to shed the inauthentic self. Feelings of incongruence within the self can be 'jump started' by loss.

- Can change in monumental ways
- Do lots of things with Photographs (I believe that the movement of and placing of them during the grieving process is linked to the healing process)
- Behave as if grief located inside us and without us. I am aware of an interaction with people, places and objects, in which I would say the grief experience is located in the interaction. (If the self is fluid and located in interaction (Gergen, 1989) then loss could be located there too)
- Behave as if grief is permanent (*A new model that sees grief as life long and as a natural part of living could be helpful. The concept of **Pathology** is the result of a medical model of grief. It could be seen as part of normal human development.*)
- Behave as if we have a grieving self, a kind of sub-personality that remembers all the pain of each life loss and stores it. This grieving self appears to be activated in the event of a new loss. The pain of each loss appears to be compounded by the losses of the past. I have witnessed myself and others interacting in relationships, with places and with objects with this grieving self. In the interaction the loss is located with great intensity and the intensity of it appears to contain the healing (*I put forward an idea that each of us has a **grieving self**, which is permanent, contains a cumulative store of pain, ready when needed to be active to take part in the process of healing. It is located in a timeless dimension of the constantly changing, fluid self, a self that is not*

*just located within the skin boundary but within interaction between the host body and the rest of the world)*

The words in italics were the rough beginnings of the development of theory. My observations and choices for the list stemmed from illuminations that I am not aware of in current theory on loss. I am aware of the literature on loss due to my professional position. I chose not to delve too deeply into it until after I have written this chapter. However, I am aware that the revelations have been such because they do not appear to be part of current understanding.

In this chapter I attempted to express myself and to be open about my loss experiences. From this 'inverted perspective' (Salk, 1983), I created material through self-dialogue. From this material identified my instances of illumination, my 'eureka' experiences of the last fourteen years. I believe that I remained with the question intensely and continuously, '*What do people do when they experience loss?*' in my choice of items for the raw list. The beginning of a holistic model of bereavement theory began to emerge, in which the complexity and idiosyncratic nature of loss experience is embraced. It also placed the bereaved in the centre as wise in seeking out action that contains the germ of healing. Such a model has strong links with person-centred approaches to counselling and the concept of the 'wisdom of the client' within the therapeutic relationship. (Rogers, 1951)

I continued to discover, moving on from initial identification and understanding of what I do and what I have noticed to others doing, when experiencing loss, to a more focussed area of human activity. Moustakas (1990), states that, '*One's own self-*



*discoveries, awarenesses, and understandings are the initial steps of the process'* (p.16) The self –dialogue experience has brought about the process of explication. This is described fully examining what had been awakened in consciousness so far.

Additional angles, features and textures of the question began to be articulated and refined. The next part of this chapter begins with an exploration into the role of writing in my experiences of loss. Some of the writing is for me alone to read, some from others to me in various forms. Within this section on writing I began to stumble into the idea of how loss can be located in a relationship. The relationship enables the loss to be acted out and becomes a new location for the loss experience.

### **Locating loss in relationships and feeling moved to write about it.**

#### ***The circumstances under which the data was collected and analysed in this section and the characteristics of the informants***

*I obtained this data by observation during 'field work' (teaching and counselling), personal life experience & personal journals & letters. The material was selected and 'thickly' described (Geertz, 1973). Some material is depicted as poems*

During periods of intense feelings of loss I have been compelled to write. Sometimes this writing has been in a personal diary, sometimes in the form of a poem.

Sometimes free intuitive writing that then envelopes a poem as I progress with the task in hand. Tristine Rainer (1978) writes of the keeping of a diary as a way of writing that encourages total freedom of expression. In my diary writing I have written as a way of reintegrating myself when experience shatters me, to help me out

of desperate loneliness and to ward off the anxiety of alienation. Anais Nin writes of this kind of diary keeping as a tool for personal development.

*'In the diary we discovered a voice for reaching the deep sources of metaphysical and numinous qualities contained in human beings. We found it in the ultimate instrument for explorations of new forms of consciousness and ecstasy. We practiced it as a way of opening vision into experience, deepening understanding of others; as a way to touch and reach the depths of human beings; as nourishment; as a means of linking the content of the dream to our actions so that they become harmonious and interactive'..... (Nin, December, 1976 Preface of Rainer, 1978 p.9)*

Deciding to keep a diary during a loss experience is a conscious act. It is an act of choosing a bounded location for interaction with the loss experience. It is contained, made concrete and possible to read over. Rainer describes the rereading process.

*'Later they reread what has accumulated from the simple act of satisfying needs and desires of the moment. And all find in their hands a book that contains -- in form, content and style- a unique, unrepeatable story of the self.'* (Rainer, 1978 p.17)

She suggests that the self can be identified as a frozen snapshot in time or perhaps more like a video clip of the self in a story. In this way personal development can occur both through the process of writing and through the process of reflection on that writing. During the early grief experience after the death of my brother, in January 1988, I wrote the following extracts in my diary. They illustrate both the idea of a

frozen snapshot and a video clip. The extracts cover a period of thirteen months.

There is a compulsion followed by fleeting desires to write, largely ignored.

*'I work hard at appearing cheerful when I feel sad. If I allowed the sadness to escape, I would be engulfed and overwhelmed to the point of helplessness. I would need time and sanctuary to deal with it... .. I feel very tearful now. The pain of losing S is just as strong as ever it was. As C.S. Lewis remarked, Grief is like being repeatedly bombed. Just when you are sure that you're over things and life is copable, another bomb is dropped on you and you're shattered once again.'* (Hunt, K. 10<sup>th</sup> October 1988)

*'Tonight the pain of loss is so deep. I am debilitated. All activity apart from deep grief has to be postponed. The physical act of writing this is a burden. Tears are cathartic for a while, then the same feelings return. Inconsolable helplessness... .. my body is heavy and my eyes sore and itchy from repeated episodes of crying.'* (Hunt, K. 20<sup>th</sup> October 1988)

*'My chest is so tight. Thoughts of S cut me to the quick. Repeated stabbings, such a physical feeling, this grief.'* (Hunt, K. 20<sup>th</sup> October 1988)

*'I find that I can only write about S in this journal now. It's my space and my time to experience the pain. I know there is so much, like a mountain growing larger and larger each day, but, hidden from view by the shadow from the sun.*

*On the outside I'm smiling and I'm living. On the inside I'm not. When I write here the pain stabs me in the heart. It's never ending.'* (Hunt, K. 9<sup>th</sup> November 1988)

*'If you want to leave me tell me*  
*I don't want a sudden wisp of wind to take you*  
*Predictable, that's what I want Now*  
*To heal the cut*  
*Some safety*  
*I must be strong*  
*Learn to see change as positive and negative*  
*This is a real possibility. It's so real I can taste the possibility of it*  
*I loved him lots before*  
*I treasure him now he's dead*  
*People should be treasured in life*  
*We're all already dead*  
*It's only a matter of time' (Hunt, K. 9<sup>th</sup> November 1988)*

*'I feel moved to write today not out of sadness and desperation but out of an ordinary desire to express myself in the written word. The world looked beautiful this morning, a beautiful red sky. I woke with a feeling of 'OK it's another day, I'll get up'. What a change from the fearful dread of facing life I've been getting accustomed to this last few weeks. I can't say I was really looking forward to the day. It was more a feeling of the passive acceptance of the inevitability of it. ' (Hunt, K. 18<sup>th</sup> January 1989)*

*'I haven't thought of writing in here for some weeks. The thought did occur occasionally but I ignored it... .. I didn't want to write. Today I feel like writing.'*  
*(28<sup>th</sup> March 1989)*

*'There's no anger. Just a quiet resolution that life is shit. I want to get off. On the outside I'm calm. Scratch away the surface and you can find the poison, the no goodness flesh of me, dead already. It's not so obvious to others how disturbed I'm feeling. I'm on the brink now, calmly on the brink of walking into oblivion. How odd? The effort we put into life. Why? It's all so pointless. We have to invent a point because there is none and there are so many ingenious rationalizations to keep alive... .. I'm lost, totally lost in the game now, lost to the reason for it all. Give me asylum somewhere. Call it heaven if you like, but take me there, please... .. I'm not allowed to experience conflict or be ambivalent... I listen, listen, listen but no one listens to me.'* (Hunt, K. 17<sup>th</sup> November 1989)

The diary extracts presented chronologically charts a process of interacting with the self through writing. This exposure of the text is the first time that this writing has been shared with others. The extracts denote an interaction between the author and the written word. The turning to the journal, to write in extreme episodes of intense feelings of loss, gives credence to the notion of the act of writing as a tool for the self exploration of loss. ***The loss can be located in the interaction between the self and the blank page. As the ink hits the paper in a succession of marks, the author makes use of this system of symbols, known as written language, to pour out pain, express the despair and existential questioning and to achieve catharsis and healing.*** In the examples given there was no desire to communicate this to others by sharing the journal. There were times when I reflected on the writing by reading previous entries during the time the journal was kept and on one or two occasions

later. My loss experience was so profound and intense that writing and interacting with it in writing was both compelling and healing.

Communicating the experience of intense feelings to another can be as compelling as interacting with the self. Sometimes in my life I have felt the need to write letters some remain unsent and some have been sent to people with whom I am experiencing interactions characterised by deep and strong feelings. Love and the experience of loss can evoke beautiful expressions in writing. The feelings of love and of loss can be inexplicably entangled. To love is to make possible the experience of loss. Others feel the need to compose poems and write stories. The extract from a novel below describes the awareness of the link between falling in love and past loss. The author, as narrator, is writing a letter to a woman he loves. In the letter he describes a walk with a friend, in Africa, in which he decides to speak about his love.

*'The evening's charm was broken when the Islamic call to prayer sounded. We crouched in the direction of Mecca, at least so we thought, and we lowered our heads as a sign of true devotion- Moudine towards his supreme God, myself- I will not pretend- out of tiredness. After a moment, I had lost somewhat an awareness of time, and his face- you must believe me - was unrecognisable. (Transformed), perhaps glowing is more accurate, but the fact is that the words that come into my head are insufficient to describe rather than sense these things, these beings. I was afraid to break this sacred moment between us. He stretched out his hand to me to help me rise (this very Arab courtesy embarrassed me nonetheless). I felt at that moment (I could see it in his eyes) that I could have absolute trust in him; that this friendship would last forever, until the death of one or the other. Now, standing, we looked at each*

*other and I began to speak of you. (with no apparent reason) but with simple phrases, very disjointed. All during our walk back I was able to express **exactly** what I felt towards you, and I felt such a sharp pleasure talking about you that my words aroused in me a quite childlike and sensual pleasure. Moudine stood there to listen, drinking in my words, occasionally asking a question. I spent an hour thus, when I suddenly realised that your face merged in my memory with the memory of my dead mother.*

*At that moment, I felt a gentle pain in my stomach*

*Like a light wound*

*Oh, nothing too serious*

*Since I liked the sensation*

*But I knew that this part of my waiting*

*Could never be healed*

*We parted then. The clouds had invaded the whole sky. He went back home in total darkness. All my consolation rested in knowing that I would see you again the next day. Henceforth let hours of serenity flow out.*

*F*

*(Laplante, 1997, translated from the French)*

The author, a friend, sent me this extract from the book saying that the woman in the story who is receiving this letter is the heroine, Katie Maxwell. He told me that the character is based on me. He includes this extract from the letter to tell me that he is

in love with me. He knows that his love for me and the yearning he describes in other communications is located in the grief he feels for the loss of his mother. His mother had died when he was 18 years old, some 20 or more years previously. He met me briefly, knew me for a few days and this interaction started a feeling of love. He wrote to me with several poems he had composed and finally wrote a novel based on his feelings for me. I suggest that this relationship with me, conducted by letter, became the location for his grief, characterised by yearning for his lost mother.

After the first meeting and the separation that followed, the author composed a poem and posted it to me.

*One day*

*On a road far away*

*I recognised my world in you*

*And my desire was to stay*

*And dance and dance on that same unknown music till dark*

*Do you feel any hate for the murder of our lost life*

*At the beginning there was an end*

*And because I see you no more*

*I only feel*

*A terrible pain*

*Do we really have to die?*



*Strange song of the day with a sad end*

*Time goes finally*

*Silently*

*Till dark*

*(Laplante, 1996)*

The poem has many references to death and to loss. He speaks of 'lost life', 'At the beginning there was an end', 'do we really have to die?' and 'sad end'. The feelings of loss seem very strong and out of proportion to the time he had known me, just 3 days. I believe that he had truly *recognised his world into me*. I was going to become an important part of his mourning for his dead mother. Our relationship had become the location for his grief. Although not aware of it, he had known it from the beginning. The poem written within days of meeting contained the seeds of the meaning of the relationship that followed. I have met with him only twice in the last seven years since the first meeting. We were never lovers. The relationship that developed at a distance was unconsummated. For my part, I recognised my dead brother in his brown eyes. My sense of loss of him after a short time was also very strong. So, something powerful happened at this meeting. Two people grieving for loved ones saw them in the world of the other and so a relationship began. A relationship which came to be the location for the experience of loss. In the months that followed he sent many poems. All expressed feelings of loss and associated pain. The following poem was composed in a state of despair.

*Drunken Ballad*

*The empty road*

*Under the spanning skies*

*Weeps incessant, heavy rain*

*The rain has started to fall*

*Deforming everything*

*A single thunderclap*

*Hurls great splashes of light*

*And in each reflection*

*You are there before me*

*Bound within the depths of my breast*

*Night comes- the space of a second*

*And for the whole of that instant*

*I remain in the darkness*

*To listen to your lips*

*And your words seem to fill*

*The emptiness of the shadows*

*But all the shadows of the earth cannot fill up my solitude*

*The empty road*

*Under the spanning skies*

*Is like the darkest crannies of the town*

*The sea does not exist*

*And time no longer is*

*I remain in the dark*

*To listen to your lips*

*Every word tears me apart*

*Like a magnificent and inevitable shadow*

*The dark road*

*Sways without ceasing*

*In all the reflections of your flesh*

*I crush you in my arms*

*I can no longer close my eyes*

*All the nights of the earth*

*In the wind*

*And beyond*

*Blindly pursue me still*

*Filling up my solitude*

*Night comes*

*I am no longer sure of it*

*Can no more close my eyes*

*A magnificent shadow*

*Appears in the darkness of the road*

*And in all reflections and around*

*I re-create your face*

*For the first time*

*In that gentle place- the sky*

*(Laplante, 1996, translated from the French)*

The deep pain of despair is apparent in this poem. The author continues to locate his grief in the loss of this new relationship and it is expressed in the poem and therefore located in the creation of the poem too. It seems to me that the relationship alone can be the location for the loss experience or it may be that the location is in the relationship and in the creation of the writing that follows from it. So it is located in both the relationship and in the writing at the same time.

**Locating the loss experience in the writing of another**

Not everyone feels the need to write letters or literature in response to loss.

Sometimes the experience of loss is located in a book or a poem that someone else has written. In this case the writer is writing about the self experience and the reader interacts with the text. Therefore the loss is located in the interaction between the reader and the writing. It's as if the writer has written knowing about the reader's life. In truth that is not so, although, it can seem that way. Roberta Flack sings a song called 'Killing me softly with his song'. In this song the words describe the experience of finding your world in the song of another. The 'as if' quality of this experience is captured well in the lyrics of the song below.

*Killing Me Softly With His Song*

*I heard he sang a good song*

*I heard he had a style*

*And so I came to see him and listen for a while*

*And there he was this young boy a stranger to my eyes*

*Strumming my fate with his fingers*

*Singing my life with his words*

*Killing me softly with his song*

*Killing me softly with his song*

*Telling my whole life with his song*

*Killing me softly with his song.*

*I felt all flushed with fever*

*Embarrassed by the crowd  
I felt he'd found my letters and read each one out loud  
I prayed that he would finish  
But he just kept right on*

*Strumming my fate with his fingers  
Singing my life with his words  
Killing me softly with his song  
Killing me softly with his song  
Telling my whole life with his words  
Killing me softly with his song*

*He sang as if he knew me  
in all my dark despair  
And then he looked right through me as if I wasn't there  
And he just kept on singing, singing clear and strong*

*Strumming my fate with his fingers  
Singing my life with his words  
Killing me softly with his song  
Killing me softly with his song  
Telling my whole life with his words  
Killing me softly with his song*

(Norman Grimbél & Charles Fox- for Grimbél productions BMI Arranged by Roberta  
flack, produced by Joel Dorn, Atlanta Records Corporation, New York, 1993)

## Three Heuristic Depictions of Loss

### *Circumstances under which this data was collected*

#### *Transcribed In-depth, Semi-structured Interviews*

After the data was collected from each participant, I entered into the material in timeless immersion. This was followed by a period of time when the data was set aside to enable me to come back to the task with fresh eyes and energy. Further reflection enabled me to create individual depictions for each participant.

The depictions were designed intuitively selecting whatever ‘jumped out’ from each of the interview transcripts as showing resonance with the 11 themes (moments of illumination) identified after immersion in the data from the self-dialogue.

After the first draft of each depiction I went back to the original data to check that it had truly captured the qualities and themes contained within it.

### *Characteristics of the informants*

Three selected participants chosen because of their experiences of loss.

#### **1. Individual depiction the experience of loss (J)**

I’ve been thinking about loss in the sense of intense experiences. I’ve had three in my life: My parents and grandmother (primarily my mother), the loss of ideas and more recently, the loss of my wife through divorce. All three losses continue everyday in different ways. The losses have certain commonalties but not compounded. The loss



is all connected with women. I hadn't thought about that before. Even though there is a 20 year time gap between the loss of my mum and the loss of my wife, I can quite easily see the linkage between them. The loss of my mum hit me in terms of having no roots but it didn't question my personal identity in the way it did when my wife left. I think that the way I function in the world and the way I perceive the world is to pigeon hole my loss experiences. There has been some sort of communality between these three experiences and there are also some unique aspects of each. If I was looking at a Venn diagram I would see them as distinct circles. The only overlap would be in the commonality of experiences, but they would be minimal. One of my experiences of loss right across the three areas is an unpreparedness for it.

The loss of my grandma happened when I was a very young child and she just wasn't there. When my grandmother died it was a shock. She played the mother role because my mother worked full-time. I couldn't understand why she wasn't around anymore. I missed her. I think I was too young to understand the notion of death. My grandmother had gangrene before she died and I've got sensory memories of it. I can still remember the smell in her room.

Another loss was when my mother died. When I went to visit my mum just before she died it was really shocking. I was just 21 years old. I had to identify the body after she died. I wasn't prepared for it. It was just a body, not her, like a vessel. *I remember they gave me her wedding ring, which I've still got.* I was absolutely distraught and just absolutely shocked and I couldn't comprehend that it had happened. The thing about it was the feeling of abandonment, abandonment and isolation. It was an ongoing loss all through my twenties and even now.

I've never met my father, so when my mother died it was like both parents dying at the same time. At Christmas, Easter and summer holidays I have no parents to visit. I only ever saw a picture of my father. I'm told that I look so much like him. It feels weird to think that I have the physical characteristics of someone that I've never known. I really should change my name because it means nothing to me. I'm carrying the label of someone I've never met. So, I may change the surname to something which is more relevant to me and the experience of me. I found out that my father died in 1978. When I heard I had no feeling of loss at all. I only regret not having the opportunity to meet him. It's an interesting comparison to hold the loss of physical people against the loss of the notion of a person, a person I've never met and never will meet. It's an altogether different experience.

My mum was very aware that she wanted me to have male role models. She would encourage me to help the milkman or go and stay with my cousin. The only male role model I had that used to come to the house was my mum's brother and the other one was my cousin. He lived with his mum in the middle of the house. My aunt was married to someone in the navy and he would come every four to five months. So, it was very much about absenteeism in respect of my immediate models.

*When my mum died the notion of home disappeared. I haven't had a home to go to since I was 21 years old. With the loss of my mother came the loss of home and communication, not being able to write to her, to phone, Mother's Day cards birthday cards, buying Christmas presents and things like that. It's going on and will go on for the rest of my life. It's like a deep sadness. It's like a toothache you've got used to.*

You know its there and it taps in sometimes. It was a powerful loss and it has influenced the way I see the world, the way I place my self in the world. It's also made me more sensitive to other people. It still hurts but not as powerfully as at the time, nowhere near, time has weakened it.

If I think of my mother then the central images that come to me are firstly musical, that Cliff Richard's song she sang. There are also visual images, the body I had to identify and tactically, the ring. *So, when I think of my mother I think of sensual things, music, her body, the ring.* If I vision her, I see her in a summer dress and an apron; she always wore an apron because she was always in the kitchen. I would place her in the physical structure of our council flat.

*'Related to the loss of my mother is the loss of photographs. I've only got one photograph of my mother and I feel like it's an object based experience of loss, not having any photographs of our relationship over time, from being a baby through to adult life. When I go to other people's houses they have black and white photographs of their parents and grandparents and I don't have that. That's another feeling of no roots'.*

I have always regretted that we did not have the money to bury her, because if we had had the money to bury her I would go and visit that place even now. I wish there was a place I could visit. I think I need that grounding, which I haven't had not since twenty-one, even before because my mum was always working so I was always with my grandmother or my aunt. I have a very strong feeling of dislocation. The nearest I can get to a location of her loss is a gold pen. She gave it to me for my twenty- first

birthday. She died just after my birthday. I still have the pen, so my memories are very intensely invested in that pen. I regularly re-visit that object. I use it in teaching when I ask students to bring an object which is important to them and then use these objects as a way of looking at how children have dreams, hopes and goals and all those sorts of things, I bring my pen.

If asked to identify and locate the response to the loss of my mum in my body, I would say that I have a resigned sense. It is not as sharp as it was. I would locate it sort of in the chest and the diaphragm area of my body. The loss has become dull. It's still there. It started very sharply and it's dropped off. I'm used to it and I've adapted to it. Every so often it's sparked by things e.g. someone telling me that it is Mother's day and then I think about my mother. But each time it's sparked it's not as intense as it was. It's more of a shadow.

Another sort of loss I've experienced is the loss of ideas. Things like beliefs in the goodness of humanity and the goodness in people. The power and energy of certain ideas which I would hope would be dominant have been weakened. I've experienced this disillusionment continually in my life. I get very frustrated that these ideas can't be. In terms of the loss of ideas, I've always found wonderment in ideas right through my childhood. As I've become adult the notion of the nobility of human beings has become questioned through a whole range of stuff. Some people are just nasty because that's how they are. It shocks me that some people live like that.

*'I try hard every day to experience one thing which is noble in the sense of the human spirit. I look at a painting, listen to some music, or read a poem or something that*

*embraces the nobility of humans. As time goes on I'm finding it harder and harder to hold onto those high ideals. The more experience I have, the more I see life in the raw, in a sense'.*

The most recent experience of loss was through divorce. It came as a shock to me. I was totally unprepared for it. It hit me very intensely. I hadn't realized how much we had grown apart. I came back and she was gone. I thought that we had been burgled. She left a letter to say that she'd gone. This experience of loss was a real shock. I just wasn't prepared for it. I hadn't realized how integrated my life was with her until she withdrew her communication. It was like having part of me removed. It was similar to the loss of my mother. I didn't tell anyone at work the loss was so intense that for about two or three weeks I didn't do anything. I just stayed at home, just cried all the time, because it was a real shock coming back and finding everything gone and her letter. I closed the door and pulled the curtains. I think at that point I was very close to suicide. It was almost like a Darwinian survival. I got to such a low place, such a dark low place; I realized it was a very dangerous place. I knew what I was capable of doing. I went to look for counseling. I wanted to get rid of this quickly. I cancelled meetings. I just sat and talked myself through it. Part of that process was by beginning to work on the house. I was going out and buying things. She left the collection of original art work. That was hard because we had chosen it together. I started buying art again by myself. I needed to know that it was something that I had chosen, although there was a sadness in not choosing it together because I was so used to sharing decisions with her. What I think that process was about was creating a safe place. I constructed the house and its contents because she took it all and left me with

an empty shell. Now, I discuss the house with friends. It's almost like I am moving away from a core relationship into establishing new relationships.

The feelings of loss well up every so often and it comes back and hits quite hard. It's still so fresh and I cry a lot. I cried every day up until about two weeks ago. It's a very intense feeling. It's in the heart and in the chest. Its also cognitive as well, it's almost like a sense of depression and a sense of shock. I'm so shocked by it and still can't believe that she's not around, after we had spent so much time together. If she'd died it would have been easier in a sense, I could have handled it easier, but knowing she's out there somewhere and that we had six years of such intense experiences together, such a history. It's just gone. I could talk to others about it but we shared it. It's very sad. Not only was she my wife but we were also best friends for six years. So, it is almost like your best friend withdrawing as well.

*'It was not only the loss of a relationship and my best friend but also the loss of my cats. What's strange is that when I cry, I cry more for the loss of my cats than I do for her. Isn't that silly, I never thought that I could get so close to animals that I would experience their loss so intensely'.*

The experience of loss has an intense centre with my wife and the two cats and from that centre it expanded outwards almost like a wave effect. There have been periphery losses as well. I was shocked that people who I had thought of as friends withdrew from me. All her family withdrew from me. Friends I thought of as shared closed down too.

*'I realized that most of the numbers on B.T. 's Friends and Family were gone. These were the people that disappeared with her. It was really painful phoning B.T. to explain and they couldn't understand that I didn't have any numbers to replace them with. I suddenly realized that I had changed from being someone who found it quite easy to have 10 numbers to someone who had really gone down to about 4 numbers. These were 4 really close personal friends and that was quite an intense feeling of loss'.*

If I placed my wife in my mind, I place her in a middle class family environment or public school and her accent is different from my mother. I place her also in her work setting and abroad because we lived abroad. It's like there has been a death because my wife has cut herself off so much. She's sort of gone. She doesn't want me to see her. She wants to start off new. She wants to have children as soon as possible. She said she did not want the baggage of an ex-husband. So I cannot have her address or communicate with her. My only contact is with her parents by post, so I feel as if it's a bit like a death in a sense. This loss hit me in terms of identity i.e. who I am as a person. I've done a lot of thinking around the notion of identity.

I have been having counseling for eight months now and every time I see the counselor I revisit the loss of my wife. I know there are other things mixed in with it but the centre of the counseling has been my wife. As the months have gone on I have mentioned her less and less. I try to make sure my weekends are occupied because I find them very sad with the loss of my wife and my network. I experience this as an experiential loss. Recently visiting friends who have cats and have visited America I found that this hit on the things we have lost. They were tough memories for me that

won't be again. This kind of thing creeps into my counseling i.e. the immediate period of time with feelings of loss that I'm sorting out. These feelings are vivid at the moment. We were writing a book together and that is now gone. She has taken that with her. I have lost the future. All those doors to the future are closed, I don't have access anymore.

The house has a lot of memories. She sanded the floor in the bedroom. Every time I use that room now the memories are invested in the floorboards in a sense. When she left I would drive past the house where she was living. One evening I got really depressed and just drove there and sat in the car because I just wanted to talk to her but I knew I couldn't because she didn't want me to. I knew I couldn't knock on the door, but I just sort of sat there and just looked at the house for a while and saw the lights were on and then I just went home. This was different from my mum because we didn't have enough money to bury her so she had to be cremated and so there was no where to visit.

The photographs and cards I have are disturbing. I didn't want to throw them away. My counselor suggested that I could maybe find a drawer so that they are accessible because at the moment they are acting as too powerful memories. Some photographs I can have around and some are just too powerful. I know that it could be better to look at the photographs in the future because I don't want to be without photographs from this part of my life. There are a whole range of things that spark off the feelings of loss.



*'I often experience these feelings of loss through objects such as E mail, letters, and objects in the house. Sometimes they are objects my wife bought and it will all focus on that object'.*

There are also places and music linked with her. She liked songs for women, romantic type music. She was always playing those. Then there are songs for me that I play that were around so they recall memories for me. There's the lighthouse family. This is one CD that I play constantly, nearly every day. I've got used to it and I like it and it comes from that period. It's the memories because I am living in the house that we chose together. It's really hard because there are so many triggers. What's even harder for me is my collection of T shirts. She collected them for me when she was travelling. My first inclination was to throw them all away because I didn't want to wear them. I could put them in a drawer. They represent six years of my life, a journey and maybe when I have travelled further down the road, I'll be able to handle it better. I didn't want to drop a gate down on six years of my life. My instinct is to throw everything away now, but I don't think that it is healthy or wise of me to respond to loss like that, like a cleansing. Since my wife left, my actions in the house have been based on creating space, creating a root which I have control of.

When going through the divorce I decide not to get angry or revengeful. This was a conscious decision right at the beginning of the process. I don't want to fight or take flight. I didn't want to fight for ground or avoid it all. What I needed to do was to stay in this hard place. I need to actively embrace what is happening and embrace it with positive energy. And learn from it. I'm naturally a fighter so I want to fight. If my wife attacks me then I want to counter them in a sense. I am absorbing them rather than knee jerking back. I am being in a staying in a hard place. It's hard when

someone's being angry with me but because I still have love, I still love my wife and it was her decision to leave, my notion of loving is to allow her to be angry with me, allow her to say the things she wants to say to me, not to kick back with negative Karma. In this way I experience the loss. I keep mindful and then I can stay focused on being the sort of person I want to be. In some ways I think my wife, who was the instigator to leave has found the loss harder to experience than I have. She has experienced the loss of ideals. She wanted to get married and stay married, have children; she envisioned her life planned out. I couldn't meet what she wanted me to be. She proactively created this. I was more of a reactive to the loss. So maybe the notion of loss includes that one can proactively create it.

In counseling I discovered that the wife that I have mourned in some ways I never really knew her. I am sad and I am mourning a conceptual structure of someone I thought I knew. Now I think there are parts of her I never really knew. It's almost like I am mourning an idea. When I hold it up I am placing some question marks around her. When I compare what has happened with what I thought I knew there is some slippage. The loss of my wife has, coupled with counseling made me more mindful than I was before she left. The loss was so severe that it's made me stop travelling on the journey, it's made me stop by the train and sit by the river and think about what the journey has been up to this point, I'm still sitting by the train and I haven't stood up to take the next step. I'm asking myself now, what sort of journey do I want to travel and what sort of person do I want to be? I have done so much work now with my counselor in terms of looking at the ways I perceive the world, the way I am in the world, the way my being is and I feel stronger to make those decisions now. I've never stopped and examined myself before and it's given me a chance to identify

areas that I've been unhappy with, somewhere in the back of my mind, but I have never brought them through. Some areas I have perceived as weakness I now perceive as strength. I think the shock of my wife leaving, knocked me sideways so much, that I just froze in time. The process has been one of self examination and reconstruction. The reconstruction is now under my own control rather than social control. I've been reading a lot of Buddhist texts and I am learning to calm my voice. I have read *The Road Less Travelled* and I did a lot of thinking about that. I am now forty three and we had planned to have children. I have had to stop and think, am I going to get into a relationship? If I want to be a father I am going to have to do it quickly or do I give up on that notion? I want to reinvent myself because I know I can do that. Do I want to be the person that my wife felt she needed to leave? Do I want to keep any aspects of myself and restructure others? So, I am trying to be mindful and that is a skill I am trying to learn. I want to be in a constant state of awareness and I have to practice it. Its bipolar, I am in a state of interaction and it's a state of being out of interaction, both at the same time. It allows me to be sensitive and reflective. So, one good thing that has come from the loss of my wife is a commitment to self. I've been reading self help books and acting on the advice. I now treat myself as a first class citizen and I don't skimp on myself by buying cheaper food, clothes or travelling on second class trains. So, I have been looking at the quality of my life as a result of my loss and I am not prepared to make do anymore. If I am going to have that intensity of pain then I am going to have that intensity of pleasure too. I've still got time to travel this journey, with this loss, so I'm going to travel it and be supportive to myself. One thing I decided to be in counseling was absolutely honest because if I am going to sit by the river and think about what to do next then when I start the journey again I need to do it with honest endeavour, I can't do it with falseness.

## 2. Individual depiction of the experience of loss (S)

There are different kinds of loss. There's loss of loved ones, friends, objects, pets and changes in lifestyle. I've been through most of these losses in my life. I've lost friends, close friends, pets and lots of changes in lifestyle. There's been so much loss.

Sometimes it's been really difficult, you're kind of indifferent to it, you tend to step back from it a little and just sort of brush it off. When you have lost objects and little sentimental things you kind of shrug your shoulders. If it's like a friend, that makes much more of an impact on your life, certainly on mine.

There have been big changes, certainly on a couple of occasions. They change the way you think, the way you perceive life. The whole of your life can be changed in the blink of an eye, so to speak.

One action, one thing can turn your whole life upside down, which is strange. I think it changes the way you react to others. You'd look for that occasion again in other things. I think subconsciously you know you always have that defence mechanism and you try to avoid it. I think at times I manipulate situations just to avoid coming close to that kind of thing again. It's hard to get too close to others.

On an everyday basis, I can remember feeling very alone and very frightened and confused all at the same time. I felt angry as well. I'm sort of speaking about one

specific occasion here. My friend stumbled out onto the road and got hit by a truck. It was a really traumatic experience for me. It was when I lived in Germany and I had not long left school. I was working for the army. We'd just finished a course and had been out celebrating and we were all drunk. We were stood there and I remember seeing this thing and I remember the sound, like a thump and not much else. Then eventually there were flashing lights and people turning up and being very hot and not feeling too well. I don't remember an awful lot about it but what I do remember is one minute my friend was there and the next minute he was gone. The impact on my life was huge.

I was left wondering what happened and how it happened and why it happened. You just feel like you're floundering, like a fish out of water, not knowing what to do, or where to turn. That kind of thing is very difficult for me. There was nothing solid to grab hold of, to rely on. How can I put it? There was nothing solid to hold onto for a while. I just felt that I was floating, just drifting around. I stayed there for along time and then you just pick yourself back up and pull yourself back together and back on some solid ground. But, as I say my life was never the same and since then I've never been the same. It changed my life dramatically. When I was younger I was always very chatty. I wasn't an overly confident boy but I would always say 'Hi' to people. Whereas now, particularly since that happened when I meet someone new I wouldn't begin to form a friendship until sort of a month and a half or maybe two months. I like to check them out. In some cases I've not spoken to people for the first month or so of meeting them. I don't know what it is. I'm just trying to sound them out. I tend to keep in this little shell. Then you slowly put your hand out and touch little things. Then you push a little further. I'm grateful for my friends though. The friends I have

now I am really grateful for because I know that they could be gone in an instant. I try and make every minute as spectacular as I can. That has been a positive impact on my life. I really live now. It changed the way I think.

I have another friend who recently suffered a stroke at aged twenty -two and now she's paralysed down her right side. So, her whole life has changed. For me it's not really tangible because it hasn't made an impact on my life, but again, it was just like a little flame in my mind lit again. I thought God, it was just like a reminder of how little we are and how fragile we are.

The quality of loss that stands out for me is the confusion of it. I am not able to understand why things like that happen. Why do we lose things? People don't like change, really they don't. I've been fortunate in that I have moved around a lot and I've had so many wonderful experiences. I'm always looking for that kind of thing. But I think, deep down, I don't like change. I look for constants in my life. I like little sentimental objects. I like people the way they are, just the way they are. I like the qualities people have. I always expect them to be the same and you can get very hurt and confused when things change, or people change for no reason. You can't really quantify it, you can't understand way. So, I would say it is the confusion of it that stands out, the confusion of loss and not being able to understand it. I tend to cope with it OK. I think I can knuckle down and get on with life but it does bug me. It niggles me.

I like certain constants. I like the changes I make myself but not the changes that I can't control. I don't like those very much. It makes me kind of angry. I don't know

what's made me like that. I don't think I've always been like that and yet I could never say there's a point where it started to happen to me. It puts my back up when a change comes that I haven't manufactured myself. I don't like that feeling at all. I don't like feeling vulnerable, ever; it makes me feel very angry.

If a friend changes all of a sudden and they are not the same then I really burn my bridges with them and I really fall back into my shell. Then I wait for a long time and touch and test the water again. So, I would retract myself back in and then I'm sort of testing and touching again. I pull back into myself really well and try to understand it on a level and then I can sort of start expanding out again, start relaxing a bit, letting people back into my circle again. If it happens at work, well that is a different scenario. I have to approach it in a different way. I've still got to be professional.

I'm quite a private person really and I do like to have my own life. I see my life as mine and I'm quite territorial in that respect. I don't like people coming into my life unless I allow them to. I'm quite secretive in a lot of ways as well.

There is an experience of loss that is vivid and at the moment it is the biggest thing I've got happening. It is happening right now. It's with my father. Now, I do not have a lot of love for my father at all. He's a very cruel man. There is something in my father that's just bad. I don't think that he can help it but there is just something bad about him and because of that, his nature, and he's a drinking man as well and that messes with his temper as well, my sister and I were brought up very violently. My father violently abused myself, my sister and my mother and a lot of my sister and my early memories are of being frightened all of the time. He'd come in and we'd be

hiding from him and the arguments would start and then things would be broken and then my mother would be getting hit and then us getting hit. Obviously we would be very upset. My father was away in the Gulf conflict as well as other things he did, but, something went wrong for him there and whether it was the injections or not, I don't know. He suffers from this Gulf war syndrome and whatever my feelings for my father are, from the outside he's a very decorated soldier and he was a very fit strong and healthy man. Now he's reduced to..... he can't walk now, he can't feel his legs from the knees down....can't feel his hands....currently, he's in hospital. He fell over in his house in Scotland a few weeks ago. I went to see him last weekend and he was very sedated and didn't know that I was there. They're going to put him in a secure environment, once his legs are healed because he can't look after himself at home. My father and mother are no longer together she eventually left him. Although, I don't have lot of love for the man himself it's a shame to see him lose everything because he's lost the lot now. He's lost the lot, he's lost everything. He's even lost his house. His health has gone. His whole personality has gone. Now we've gone as well. My sister has no contact with my father at all. So, that's made quite an impact on my life. It's made me a little bit more cynical.

My sister tends to feel more and this is my sister speaking more than myself. She feels kind of let down. She doesn't have the emotional crutch that other people have. Other people talk about their parents and she feels she doesn't have that. I've sort of echoed that in things I've said. At times, I feel that I agree with her. You look for someone to blame but there's no blame to be had anywhere. It's just one of those things.



I never really relied on the security of my home. Or, maybe I did subconsciously. I never thought I did. I think it was just something I was complacent to. I always imagined it would be there when I needed it, selfishly and now all of a sudden it's gone. It's difficult for me to deal with. I don't deal with things particularly well. I'm a kind of jumble like that. I run away from them in lots of respects. I try and not deal with it and put it off. It's something that I never ever talk about. I don't discuss things like that with my friends. I always sort of laugh them off and change the subject. I move on and then deal with it myself. I've never understood it and I think I hide from myself in that respect. I don't know what I do. My mother asked me. She asks me about these things and I changed the subject. But, every now and then things fall back on me. It's like an emotional storm. I'm so frustrated and angry and there's no way to vent it. It comes out in physical tension and that's why I train. I train hard.

I used to practise a lot of Marshall Arts and that was very helpful to me. I wouldn't say that I am particularly emotionally mature now, but when I was younger I was worse. I'd have like a temper tantrum. I wouldn't be silly and break things but I would get so frustrated with myself and I'd smother it. There would be this rage and I would just have to go away by myself and take awhile to calm down. I was a mess. So, that's helped me a lot with that because it was somewhere that I could concentrate and it helped me to focus on something to try and clear my mind a little bit and work out. Punching bits of wood and things like that was handy too. It was a discipline. It helped me to train my mind. I think I can think more clearly because my thoughts were always much jumbled.

I was at boarding school from the age of six. I never felt as if I had a relationship with my parents, where I could sit and speak with them. I never ever did that. We were just people living together and I always saw myself as a little bit distant from them. My sister didn't go to boarding school. She stayed at home. I never held that against them. My sister is my closest, closest friend. I'd do anything for her. I carry a photo of her in my wallet and I speak about her all the time. I just felt with my parents that I never had a bond with them where I could just sit and speak about things. My sister speaks to my mother as a friend. I never had that. There again I don't speak to my friends that way either. I'm very solitary in that respect.

If I am asked what events, situations and people are connected with my experience of loss I would say there is the loss of moving. I changed school as a child and the people you saw every day for two years are all of a sudden out of your life. My grandparents passed away. There were pets we had, even hamsters and goldfish. They would die and there would be a change, just like that. There were cats given away because you can't take them with you when you move. Even silly things like pieces of furniture. Your bedroom is your own when you're a child. It's your own little haven. I'm quite sentimental about things and I like little things that I've had for a long time. These are things people have given me and I associate memories with them and it would be, 'Oh, we can't really take that. We haven't got room' and it would just get thrown away. Looking back we would just say 'Oh well' but there are things I wish I still had, things I wishes I'd kept.

I feel like people made a lot of decisions for me. My father did. I think my father was a very controlling man. He was controlling to the extent that my mother had to ask

permission to do things, simple things. At the time it was just normal because you don't know any better. When you listen to what other people say you think back and wonder why it was how it was. Then the changes have come and I'm back to that confusion and not understanding why all those things happened. Why couldn't we be happy like everyone else seemed to be? I don't know if all my friends were happy. I'll never know.

It's hard for me to know about the feelings I associate with loss. I'm not particularly good at dealing with things like that and I can't. In so many ways I am methodical. I write things down. But, as soon as it comes to emotional issues, I'm not very good at all. It's hard for me to decide what's wrong at times. I've never really understood that about myself and it really frustrates me. It makes me angry. It's just a feeling of confusion and I feel like I'm floating. It's like a storm and it's like anger, it's fear, it's confusion, it's love, it's hate. There are so many aspects to just one feeling. When we were young we never spoke about things like that. We didn't speak, we were just told what to do. We were told to shut up. We didn't speak. We weren't supposed to.

When I was a child I read a lot. I was always reading books. I wanted to learn things. I wanted knowledge. I wanted to stretch my mind. I wanted to know loads of experiences. I was always interested in the world. I was always been interested in different cultures. So, I wanted to learn all the time. I used to escape to the library and just sit and read. It was an escape from the house because I didn't want to be there. Now, I just want time with my friends. I can go out and be the life and soul. That's brilliant for a while, but every now and then I just need to be by myself. I need to go away and go up in Scotland or wherever and just paint for a couple of days. I take my

wee tent, just by myself and just think things through. I think about everything from when I was knee high up to now. It's like going away and recharging and then coming back. I don't know if it's me running away, back into my shell for a little while, then coming back and building again. I seem to do it very often, every couple of months. I need time like that, where I have to run away and just be by myself.

I like to paint and make things. I'm very creative. I like to play music. It's something that's totally mine and no-one else can change it. I love music so much because it's something I've created out of nothing, and painting and drawing. You've got something basic like a blank sheet of paper, you're writing a song and you're making it out of nothing and it's totally yours. If somebody doesn't like the tune or the piece of work it doesn't matter because you've made it out of nothing so it's perfect. There was nothing there before and it's something that's totally mine. It's like a little treasure for me. I can find that treasure in other people's songs. I hear a tune and I've just got to have it, to own it. I have my favourite bands because they write something and I think that's wonderful that they have done that and they become treasure for me. I have to own them. I hear it and I've just got to have it and it'll be very special to me. Sometimes I can see my life in a song or a painting. You hear a song or you see a painting like *The Scream*. I think it's a wonderful piece of work, the torture in that one frame. It just reflects one instant in time for me and it's wonderful. It's a wonderful piece of work. I have a copy of it in my flat. I always promised myself I would get one. It's just the impact of the whole thing, just the whole figure, but there's everything around it has worked as well. You know the sound that would be coming out, but wonderful as well.

I do see myself echoed in other things. I attend to things like that. When I see something that has an echo of me in it I want to own it. I want to have it, to take it. I want to take it home with me and have it. I don't know if that's on a level with me keeping it away from others as well, because I see myself in it. Maybe others see me in it and I wouldn't like that. I would then make me feel vulnerable to people and I would become that frightened little boy again. At times I do feel like that kid. I do still feel the same. It's inside and every now and then it comes out. Things will happen to me and I will just feel helpless again. I feel that I'm hiding under the stairs or whatever and there's nowhere to go.

If I experience loss in my body I think of when I was younger and in my late teens as well. I used to grit my teeth when I was feeling confused, to the extent where it would be quite painful and on a couple of occasions my gums actually swelled up a little bit when I was gritting them so hard and clenching my fists. I used to walk about. I used to walk about for hours gritting my teeth because I'd feel that I'd just explode. The pain is in my jaws and my teeth and just right into my cheek bones. I was just gritting so hard, just sort of clamping down on them.

Sometimes I feel really tensed up in my muscles and tight in my hands. I could never deal with it. I didn't know how to deal with it because I'd never spoken to anyone about it. When you are trying to grow you grow physically but you have to grow emotionally as well. But, I never had anyone to speak to about that kind of thing. So, I kind of busked it. I just kind of got through it. I don't feel very aware of myself at times, emotionally. I just gritted my teeth and made myself tense all the time. It doesn't happen so much now. I certainly haven't gritted my teeth for along time. I've

caught myself going to do it a few times and I've realised and I've thought 'Oh, stop that', because I knew it would be sore. It has been so painful because they really swelled up. They swelled up just because of the pressure.

In terms of time factors I associate with loss there are certain times. Certainly with my friends I remember anniversaries. The boy I spoke about earlier, on that day I will always remember him. I always go away for a little while.

Sometimes night times can be hard. I have a recurring nightmare. There is a clown chasing me. I'm frightened of clowns and I have this nightmare and I just wake up. When something stressful has happened I think, 'I wonder if I'll have that dream tonight', just before I'm drifting off. The dream has happened since I was very little. I can't remember when it started. It's always the same and absolutely terrifying. It's a chasing dream. I'm being chased by a clown and I don't know why. I'm scared of clowns. I think they are really creepy. Every clown's face is happy and jolly but there's always a tear, isn't there? I just see that as something really false and just somewhere inside me I know it's a lie. It's like they're hiding something, with the mask as well, the make-up and the wig and they're not like that. Because, underneath I know there is a person. Underneath this whole charade there's a person. So, I'm being chased by a clown and I think he's got a big knife or something and I'm running and there's fairground music playing, but it's all discord. So, I'm running and I know he's catching me. I run round the corner and there's a bin and I get into it. It's like a wheelie bin size. So, I get into it and pull the lid over and I'm hiding and my heart's thumping and I'm terrified, rigid with fear and he runs past and I'm watching through the gap in the lid and he runs about five paces and stops and looks and you

know that sad face they do, he runs back right at me with that sad face and then a big smile and he runs over and just as he pushes the lid off I wake up. I'm absolutely rigid with fear, terrified. It's happened right through my life. Every now and then it comes back and I don't know what it's all about. I don't know why I have that dream. It's always exactly the same and I don't know what's going to happen. I know the dream is coming and I try to say to myself in the dream 'Stop it!', but I'm just terrified. I looked it up in a dream book once. My sister has a book. She's into that kind of thing. I found clowns and I thought 'Right, I'll get to the bottom of this'. It had one line, 'Others think you are stupid'. The rest of the dreams had paragraphs and pages and just one line for clowns. I thought, 'Great'. I'm going to bin the book. The dream is so scary. It's terrifying. Sometimes when I've had girlfriends to stay over I've woken up rigid with fear and I'm seething. They've tried to wake me up because apparently I get angry. I get so frightened and I just have to run and then I think, 'Oh great, there's the bin. Sometimes I think, 'Oh well I'll wake up soon' and 'I've just got to get this bit out of the way. It's strange because I should be able to wake myself up and I should be able to stop the dream, but at the time I'm terrified. It's not in my control. I hate it.

There's another dream I have but it's not very often. I don't know if the dream is always the same but I can remember it's a woman with a face like an egg. It's a porcelain face, but it's flat. There are no features and I wake up frightened from that as well. I've only had that dream a few times and it's just this figure. The clown dream happens more often and that's scary. With this dream even when I wake up I know it's just a dream and I'm back from it. I go back to sleep and then I wake up the next day and think, 'Oh, I had that dream again last night.'

There are space factors that I experience with loss. I just need to be by myself. When I spoke about the loss of a lifestyle or if I'm not feeling well, if something is not right with me, something not constant about my health, then I just need to be by myself and deal with it however I'm going to deal with it and then reintegrate with other people. I just go back into my wee shell again. Sometimes folk pollute it, pollute my time. They contaminate the time because they ask you things. I'm trying to discipline my self.

I'm trying to discipline my mind and trying to put things in little boxes, little categories and just relax and be myself. People are great and they mean well but I do need the time. I know that's bad of me and selfish because I know that there are a lot of people that care for me and they do genuinely want the best for me. but, I just need my own time to come round and once I've got myself back to where I need to be, once I'm back on a level plane, then fine, I've got all the time in the world for them. When I'm at my emotional peak, when I'm really traumatised, I just need to be by myself, because I can't cope with them. I can't cope with them distracting me and stopping my methodical reintegration. I do things step by step. I've got this little thing I go through. I wouldn't be able to write it down. I have these little steps I follow to get myself back to normal, so to speak.

### **3. Individual depiction of the experience of loss (N)**

I know from textbooks that there are supposed to be set stages that you go through when you experience loss. According to Adams it's seven. There's immobilization denial and all those others and it starts to pick up after the depression at the letting go.



Then there's the search for meaning. I know that with children, in theory it's very different. I was talking to my friend, we were having coffee, and I was saying how that seemed a bit too ... too textbooky ... and she was saying that there was someone she knew who was doing a PhD and she's in the Anthropology Department, who has completely refuted the sort of Kublar Ross and Adams' models. From what my friend was saying, it's more or less like that for everybody. It doesn't follow those set patterns, so I don't know. I mean I know bits from textbooks.

When my friend was murdered four years ago, her children were very young, the same age as mine were and I read the relevant chapters in the Beverly Raphael book to try to understand what it was like for them and I found that helpful. But, what do I know that's from experience and not textbooks. I know that with those three children, the two younger ones find it quite easy to talk about their mum and the older one is in denial. We go out a lot with the children and the grandmother, who takes care of them. When we all go out together usually my husband has all the boys in his car, my two and my friend's sons and I have the grandmother and my friend's daughter and my two girls in my car. When we came back from a day trip a few months ago, one of my friend's son's said to his brother, 'Remember when we used to go off in the car with mam and dad', and the other son said, 'It never happened ... it didn't happen, it didn't happen'. He just never ever talks about it at all. My son and this boy have been close since they were babies, and my son says, he never mentions it.

From my experience, daddy's death was a complete shock, because he was really extremely healthy and energetic and fit. He was seventy-two but he looked at least ten years younger and it was a shock, but it was nowhere near as traumatic as I thought it

would be. That was in 1987 and mammy died last year, so she had been ten years a widow. She was marvellous and she got tremendous strength from just believing that he was there with her all the time, guiding and making everything right and she was just always so grateful for the gift of life. Both my parents really milked life, they didn't ever have any money, but they just loved the important things like families and friendship and lovely sunny days and felt that they were, you know, the luckiest people alive, which was wonderful. When mummy died it just felt ... I wasn't even ... I wasn't shocked or upset, I just felt closer to her than ever and I still do. They retired to Ireland, to the cottage there where my mam was born. It was absolutely gorgeous. My sister lives there. It's in the heart of the countryside. It's a mile from the nearest village. It's at the foot of a hill, and if you climb up the hill there's a ruined castle on the top and you can see for miles. You can see right over the Atlantic. It's just wonderful and within a year of being there he died. Daddy was a man of the earth. He was self sufficient in vegetables and soft fruits Mam used to say that whenever she was looking out of the window at dad in the garden, there would be a little robin, always perched on the handle of the spade, or on the gate. There was always this robin with him. After he died, the robin was just always there for her. It was on the window ledge. It was looking out.

At mammy's funeral, a Red Admiral butterfly, this is the end of February, beginning of March, fluttered up from the coffin and sort of danced around in the vaults and then fluttered down and went behind the screen at the back of the altar. There were gasps from everybody in the church. They all saw it.

I volunteered to write to all the people we hadn't been able to get in touch with after mam died. So, for weeks I was getting all these letters back and one morning, my husband was away and it was before I'd gone back to work. I got this letter from someone, who I knew of, but didn't know, he was an elderly man who had married one of my mam's elderly women friends later in the late sixties or early seventies. The lady had died recently of cancer and this letter was just so lovely. He wrote of how much my mam had meant to him and how close my mam and his wife were and it just touched something in me, and I was so upset sitting there. I'd just picked up the mail from the mat and I was sitting on the bottom stairs reading it and I just found myself weeping. I suppose the guy had just lost his wife and he looked on my mam as a really dear friend and I think it was his sadness that upset me and I thought, now what my mam say to me now. She would say, 'pull yourself together', so I put my warm clothes on, it was a lovely crisp cold winter's day and I went for this long, bracing, vigorous walk. I live in wonderful walking country and I saw all unusual bits of nature. There were oyster catchers and I think they're so dear. It was just really wonderful and then I got really high up to the highest point of the walk, and there was this Red Admiral, in early March, fluttering around. So, I suppose my recent experiences of loss haven't really felt like loss, because I know that they're with me and guiding me. They don't seem to fit into that textbook pattern of what loss is supposed to be.

My friend's children seemed to fit into what Raphael was saying about loss, but then there's this other little boy and he's had all the same sort of care and therapy as his siblings. I think the textbooks are useful as a point of reference but too simple and it's such an individual thing. They don't talk about the robins and the butterflies and yet

things like that are so incredibly important and significant. When you need those reminders and those signs they appear.

When I think of early losses I think of when I was twenty. The guy I'd been engaged to up until a year previously, was killed in a road crash and it was weird. Within the same week, he'd died suddenly, my husband's mum had died, not as suddenly as my dad, but she had a massive heart attack and had been on a life support for a week and died. A little boy I used to baby sit for, who would have only been four, died of a brain tumour and at the time I was an atheist. I'd been brought up a Catholic and at the age of 16 I stopped believing in it and became an atheist and it was weird really, because I was thinking of those early losses that came when I was twenty, all in one week and I found that was my first experience of death and to have three in one week! I found that so deeply disturbing and unsettling, and I couldn't... just couldn't take it on board. Even now when I think back to the feelings I had then I don't think there are feelings actually, to describe it and when my husband's dad's died, that was three years later, and in a plane crash, it was awful to think of all of those deaths I think horror is the nearest word to what I felt, and a sick feeling and a waking up in the morning and remembering. I can remember thinking you're just waking up, like you did all the rest of your life and then remembering that this awful thing has happened. I was waking up and for a second feeling like you do when you wake up and then, the memory of that. That was really the way I felt for months after Dunblane (*children gunned down in a school in Dunblane*) it was that waking up in the morning and then remembering they weren't my children.

By the time daddy died, I'd sort of regained my spirituality and stopped being an atheist. I had twenty years of being an atheist and just in time I decided I wasn't an atheist any more. I felt really close to dad and you know, I still chat to him. In fact I do more so now than even then, but I did then, because I felt that I guess he had mam to look after so I didn't used to pester him. But what struck me about that was my dad was the first dead body I'd ever seen, and that stands out, because I found that really quite shocking. He died in London, at my sister's house and they'd come over from Ireland and dad went out for a walk and came back and he said, 'Oh I feel a bit cold', and so my sister gave him a glass of whisky and he died with a glass of whisky in his hand. We were all saying how well he looked and so that was a real shock. Talk about going out, making an exit, it was the night.... that night, it was the night of that huge, huge, huge hurricane. I went down to London on the train and then I was sleeping in the same bed as mam at my sister's house and we couldn't sleep because of all this wild noise and it was just mayhem in London. I mean, they think they could cope with a nuclear holocaust but it was just in total, total disarray and not functioning, everything down, including trees across the road and everything. My sister's friend drove us to the undertaker's, and mam had already been and she said, 'Do you want to go and see your dad?' I felt that she wanted me to go and see him and I also knew from what I had read, that it helps the grieving process if you do see the body.....do go through all the rituals and so, I went along and she was saying, 'Oh doesn't he look lovely, look he's smiling' and I didn't think he looked lovely at all, I thought he looked awful, because he didn't look at all like dad.... he just didn't and he was white and waxy and mam went to kiss him and so I thought I should do the same and that really shocked me, you know, to feel how waxy and how icy cold he felt, that really shocked me and I remember feeling really outraged that in this society we're so cut

off from death and it's sort of sanitized and kept out of sight and away from everything, so that for most people, the first dead body they ever see, which can be quite shocking, is someone who they love and was very close to them. I remember feeling really angry about that and at the same time knowing that what was there in that coffin was really nothing to do with my dad anymore. I felt that it seemed a bit sort of gruesome, macabre and horrible, to me. Another thing that stood out about seeing his body was when I went down there to London and I knew that I probably would see his body and I remember mum saying that when she'd seen somebody's body, I don't know whether it was grandparents or something, she could remember the smell of death and that really horrified me, the idea of being able to be reminded of it by a smell and so I decided that I wouldn't wear perfume because if I do, I'll always associate that perfume with this occasion. I was wearing a lambskin coat that mam had bought me for a wedding present. It had a big curly collar, and I had been wearing 'Lulu' perfume some days before and the smell was still in the collar and after that whenever I smelt 'Lulu' I wanted to be sick and I could never wear it myself again.

When my mam was very little she lived in Kent. She was born in Ireland. They went over to Ireland to her mother, her mummy's homestead in Ireland to be born, because it was during the war and the zeppelins were coming over and they were down in Kent at the time. For her early years my mam was in England, in Kent. There were flowers in the garden. There was a particular fragrance that she associated with the garden in Kent and her memories of it are very sparse because she was three when they came up north. She said, when she came up north, 'Everybody talked very strangely at first, but gradually they all got to talk like me'. After her dad died,

whenever it was a special significant day, like a birthday or an important event, she would always get the fragrance of flowers. It just came wherever she was, you know, she didn't necessarily have to be in a garden, she might be shopping in a department store, or in the house and she could smell it and I'm sure that he was doing that deliberately. It's real.

When mam died, she was waked in the cottage in Ireland, and because the cottage is so tiny and the doors are so tiny, they couldn't get her coffin in, so she was waked on the bed, and so when we went she was just lying on the bed and she looked so beautiful. I mean she was 80 but honestly, she looked so beautiful and young and she looked lovely. I almost wanted to take a photograph and somebody else had suggested it too, an Auntie. She said, 'Take a photograph, so you can send it to people who couldn't come to the funeral'. My sisters and brother were horrified at the thought. So, I thought, I'd better not do. It's unusual to take photographs at funerals unless you're famous. My siblings were really horrified at the thought of taking one and I was thinking, but she looks so beautiful. My niece, who would have been about six, six going on seven, she had this frog and she kept trying to get into bed with grandma and then putting the frog in bed with grandma. I said, 'You're really not supposed to do that', and she was laughing away and I thought, 'You know, grandma will be killing herself laughing ... 'Lying in the wake', she'd have said, '..With the rosary beads around my hand, and this frog tucked in the blankets'!

If I think about anything really vivid and alive today in my life concerning loss  
The first thing that comes into my mind is, that it doesn't feel like loss to me  
anymore. That's because I feel my mother's presence so strongly and I do have a

really strong belief that it's not loss, because those we've lost are still with us and looking after us and that's very vivid. During my mam's last ten years, after dad died, she never feared death at all and when she actually did go, she chose to go ... I mean it wasn't euthanasia or anything, but she suddenly got very ill ... had really, really bad flu the Christmas before last, and because she was on blood pressure tablets and anti-coagulants and ... you know, she just ... as people do ... she always had a very healthy life, but when they start to wind down they need all these tablets, and the tablets they gave her for the flu as well, were just ... the combination was awful, she just felt so ill ... couldn't eat, couldn't drink and everything tasted horrible and she had always had a heart murmur all her life, and I think, just gradually, her heart slowed down and she chose to go into hospital for two weeks to give my sister a break, but my sister didn't want a break. Her three kids had left home and she really loved looking after mum and they were so close. My sister lived in the village which was a mile from where mam lived and they spent every day together. While the youngest girl was at school my sister was just always up at the cottage. She took mum shopping and they did everything together. She went into the local cottage hospital, and she was due to come out on the Saturday, and on Thursday, this new doctor was doing the rounds, and he had a very brusque manner and he said to mam, 'Of course you know you'll never be able to live on your own again?' That was always my mam's worst fear, being dependent on anybody. She had always said to us, even when we were little, 'If I ever get like your granny' .... because both our grannies died of Alzheimer's and it's not nice at all... 'just put a pillow over my face and keep it there'. She didn't want to be a burden to anyone and within twenty minutes of him saying that, she just died. I'm sure she thought, 'If that's the way it's going to be, I want out'. She never feared death.



When I think of my dad's death I always think about that hurricane .Another thought is that at both my mam's and my dad's funeral me and my sisters sang and at mam's, my sister's two older girls sang this beautiful Gaelic song and it was just so magical and the acoustics in church are wonderful and they both sang like angels ... this gorgeous lilting song in Gaelic and that was just breathtaking. They sang it so beautifully. We were able to write quite a lot of stuff and say it at the funeral for mammy and everyone said how lovely it was and also I'm my mammy's double. I look like her and sound like her. In Ireland, when someone dies, they come from all the villages around, they really do believe in giving everybody a good send off. The church was absolutely packed and these people who knew my mam, who I didn't know, kept coming up and saying, 'Oh, you're so like her ... 'Ah sure you're so like her' ... 'You're lovely, just like your mammy'. That felt really good. I look at myself in the mirror and the older I get the more and more I look like her and my husband's always saying, 'Stop pulling your mum's face'.

My parents' death was natural and that feels right. I was really quite surprised at my reaction to their deaths. When I was little the thought that my parents were going to die would leave me being absolutely panic-stricken, terrified at the thought of it. I just never ever wanted it to happen and I still wouldn't have wanted it to happen but I was amazed because I was expecting to be grief stricken and really very sad and moping for a long, long time and I wasn't at all.

I don't have the same fear and horror of death that I used to have. When my ex fiancé, future mother in law and the little boy I used to baby sit for, died, that was just really

horror to me and I don't have that feeling any more. So, that's sort of vivid and stands out. You had the feeling that it's natural, it's right, and that they're with us, when my parents died. But having said that, I would hate to die at this stage, because I think, you know, early death is just... .. When I think of my friend, who was murdered, that was just the worst tragedy ever for me. I've known of awful things happen to other people but not anybody I know and her husband killed her and he's doing life. So, the children were just orphaned. So those sort of untimely deaths are just ... .. I think that's probably why Dunblane affected me so much and I'm sure most other people too, because it shouldn't ... the children ... It shouldn't have happened ... No way. It's not the kind of natural way of things.

My child minder does the tarot and she's clairvoyant as well, and she was doing my cards a few months ago and she said, 'Your dad's here and he is really upset and he keeps saying sorry to you'. I said 'There's nothing to be sorry about' and she said, 'He's got a present for you and it's there on the table, pick it up ... and I went like that ... and she said, 'No it's there and it's a red rose and that's to say sorry'. I picked it up and sniffed it and thanked him and I had one of those British Heart Foundation red roses, so I wore that for ages, it was like a sort of symbol of the present from my dad. When I was very little, he was really quite brutal and also very loving. He had such a sort of brutalized childhood and huge family of itinerant farm workers and that was very sort of rough childhood. He had very little schooling and I think that's probably what the sorry was about and he was really looking out for me and trying to make things work for my husband and I so that we would always be comfortable. I think he always felt inadequate that we weren't rich.

I have warm feelings about mam's and dad's losses. I never really allow myself to think too hard about my friend's murder, even though, I see an awful lot of her mam and the three children. If I allow myself to think about it, I get very upset, so I don't. Even the earlier deaths which were really sort of horrific and very hard to cope with, since I stopped being an atheist, I talk to them now. I talk to all those people. I didn't believe in all that before, I thought when you were dead, that was it and I just don't believe that any more.

My mum always gets me parking space. It doesn't matter which crowded city in the middle of rush hour it is, she always gets me parking space. People just slide out and I just slide in. I usually give her warning, at least ten minutes.

If I think about my body I am aware of loss in the heart. With my friend's death, it's a real sort of ache, but with my parents it's a sort of real warmth. It's in the same place but a different feeling.

I suppose when I hear about other deaths, then I think about the ones that have particularly moved me or have touched me and always when I drive past where my friend is buried I talk to her.

The most significant thing for me is when it's an untimely death, I feel very comfortable with the idea that it's part of life and because I don't believe that it just stops there. I've read about the sort of near death experiences and out of body experiences and they all say the same thing and it almost makes me think, it's something to look forward to.

Before mam died, I was speaking to her on the phone, it was just over a week before and she sounded really poorly and I decided that the next morning, I was doing a community class that finished at 11, and that I was just going to go straight to the travel agents and get a ticket over to Ireland, which I did and the only cheap one I could get meant I had to be there for a week, so I was there with mam for a week. I've got a wonderful book and it's usually by my bed, called, 'The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying', that my American cousin gave me and it had visualization exercises you can do, when you're with people who are dying. I did these exercises and it felt so good to be helping to make the death easier and because of mam's very strong Catholic beliefs, and Jesus figures very largely in the visualizations, she just felt wonderful. She looked really so much better each time I did it and her breathing was really sort of irregular and difficult, because she got really bad arthritis of the spine at the same time as this flu and within a few weeks she was almost bent double, and she found it very difficult to breathe. But, after the exercise she was much better.

My mam's sister was dying and her daughter and family were on holiday. Everyone was saying she's hanging on until the daughter and children get back, which I do believe she was, then I was on my own with her for about two hours and when I was little, she always used to sing to me and so I sang to her. I sang for two hours and I sang all of the Irish songs and her breathing became steady and regular and she didn't ever open her eyes and regain consciousness, but I knew she could hear me singing and then her daughter and granddaughters arrived and I snook away and she died while they were there. So, I think that, old people sort of do have that power to be able to decide when they're going to die.

## Portrait of Loss

### *The Circumstances under which this data was collected and the characteristics of the informants*

One research participant joined me and a colleague in writing a published paper (Ingram et al, 2000) whilst considering the data from one interviewed participant. During this process the three authors' constructed an individual portrait of loss. This was constructed as the introduction to the paper. It is a detailed description of the childhood of one of us.

### *'My Mum'*

*My mother was brought up in London, the daughter of a tailor and his wife, who helped in the shop. I never knew my grandfather but in the black and white pictures we had he always had a proud handlebar moustache and was standing very straight. He looked like a nice person. And I was always told that he drunk his money at the 'Red Lion' on the corner of our street. My Nan lived in the same house with us for a while and made a lot of rice pudding and fed me raw liver as a toddler because it was 'good for me'. I had contracted meningitis as a child when a girl sneezed in my pram in a launderette, so I think my Nan felt that the liver was good for my blood. I'd been in hospital for eight weeks and my eyes, my mum told me, had gone like a panda's- black and green all round. She thought I was going to die so they brought a priest to the intensive care to baptize me-she told me it was strange because of the glass between us when I was blessed. She said she cried, she was scared and alone-my father was in South Africa. My Nan was diabetic and, from the constant injections into the backs of her knees contracted gangrene in her leg. I still remember the smell*

*of gangrene –a sick, sweet putrid odour. Since she lived at the bottom of the house we rented I stayed with her while she was at home in bed to 'keep her company', while my mum was out at work. I must have been three or four years old. She would lie in bed and we would listen to the radio or play draughts. She would show me my granddad's medals and tell me about him and the 'Great War' in which he was a sniper in the infantry. My Nan was taken away one day when the gangrene was too bad and came back with one leg. She never recovered really; I wasn't allowed to visit her in her room anymore although I used to listen for her as I missed her so much. She died soon afterwards but I wasn't allowed to go to the funeral as I was 'too young' my mum said. I remember the relatives coming to the house and sitting in her room arguing about who was going to have what of her things. They took my granddad's medals.*

*My mum left school at fourteen and worked the rest of her life as a typist. I remember her working at a local factory, at London transport for the Ministry of Defence. She would leave early each morning and come back late; my memories are that this was after dark. We were a one-parent family; my father, when I was two, moving to live in South Africa, Cape Town. I never knew him and our only contact was that once a month a letter would come to the house with a monthly child support cheque. This was always a special time as we could go to the corner shop and buy a packet of Player's Weights cigarettes for my mum and a bottle of R.W. White's cola for me. We must have been poor as this time was so special and we never really had any of these 'treats' at any other time.*

*My mum was out a lot working and I would play on the streets in the summer and winter, after dark sit indoors waiting for her to come home. We lived in a three room flat at the top of an old Victorian house in Shepherds Bush. I wasn't to put the light on or light the fire before she came home because of 'strangers' knowing that someone was in.- now, as an adult, I know it was because she was worried about me and the 'Welfare' finding out that I was there without her. I must have been about seven. I always associate sitting in the dark with waiting for her to come home- even now at age forty-four.*

*My mum died of cancer over a two year period: from breast cancer-after a mastectomy followed secondary cancers one year later-and finally of bone cancer in the Royal Marsden in Fulham, London.*

*We kept her at home as long as we could cope but the care she needed was too intense in the end. Even to the end the doctors were asking me not to tell her it was cancer and she kept asking me what was wrong with her- I have always regretted carrying out what the doctors said was best for her.- I still feel that our relationship ended in lies and an untruth between us.*

*Two of the hardest events for me at this time that still relate to my grief was having to identify her body even though she died in hospital- the body was grey and sallow and the hair white; in that last visual image that I carry of her, it did not look like the person I knew at all. Soon after this I had to find out about funeral arrangements. I asked friends what I need to do and they explained. I went to the Co-op, she had always been a member there for her 'divvy'- there was a range of coffins and cars,*

*flowers, etc. She had left £200 and I was living week to week. The money only covered the basic coffin and car; I had to borrow some money to make up the difference. It was so hard having to pay for the cheapest funeral possible when I knew she deserved far more. I still regret and have pain over that experience' (Ingram et al 2000)*

(Ingram, J. Hunt, K. & Robson, M., 2000)



## **Adopting a certain lifestyle following loss**

Is this a post modern response to transition, or a desperate response to not feeling able to proceed through a rite of passage during the mourning period?

### ***The Circumstances under which this data was collected and the characteristics of the informants***

During the heuristic research process, after immersing myself in the data collected via interviews, I noticed, after writing up individual depictions and being part of the way through the creative synthesis that it is possible to recognise an overarching style in the way people do loss. This idea came to me one morning as a 'eureka' experience. It was the result of pondering, sleeping on, discussing, walking and playing the piano over some weeks after initially focussing intently on the depictions and synthesis.

In this section I intend to explore what that style may be for each of the interviewees and consider how understanding loss behaviour as a style in this way might be part of a post modern movement towards individual experiencing of bereavement (Walters, 1999, P.207)

### **Exploration**

Walters (1999) has argued that.... '*The postmodern celebration of diversity over monolithic theories of human behaviour*' .....(p.114), has opened the door into new understandings of bereavement. He cites the work of Stroebe et al (1992) in suggesting that postmodernism is intolerant of overarching 'metanarratives' and

instead emphasises the diversity of voice. Henceforth, theorists are beginning to recognise that there is no one way to grieve.

If it is now the time to be a post modern mourner then, this move towards a higher profile given to individual choice does indeed confirm that everyone is different. Yet, I recognise myself and my own behaviour and style of living in the accounts of the research participants. Maybe it's not totally individual, maybe we choose from a range of lifestyles, all with uniqueness and individual quirkiness, and all sharing this notion of placing the individual betwixt and between. As mourners, from all kinds of losses we are dislocated and find ourselves living in between. This idea of being betwixt and between is a phrase used by Turner (1977) he suggests that the bereaved are caught between the world of the living and that of the dead. This idea could be extended to include all loss experience. The transition from one phase of life to the other when there is any kind of loss requires movement of some sort. Being 'betwixt and between' could be seen as a temporary state in response to loss or a more permanent lifestyle with many consequences for the mourner and those who share their lives. Kelly-Lane (1997) writes about unconscious processes at different levels. She asserts that the story of Peter Pan is the result of childhood suffering. She identifies Barrie, the author of the play, as a sad child who has managed to resist a total breakdown. In fact his life and work have been built on the capacity to resist. Peter Pan flies away from home on the day of his birth because he didn't ever want to grow up. Barrie was born to a mother mourning another child.

*'Unlike many other men, James Matthew Barrie knew that he was different, that he was a 'betwixt and between' but, despite the lucidity of his writings, he was doubtless*

*unaware of the consequences that his 'state' could have not only on himself, but also on many other people.* ' (Kelly-Lane, 1997, p.126)

I agree with Kelly-Lane, as she notices that awareness of self is not always evident and informed choice of lifestyle is much more of an ideal than an actual choice for many people in this postmodern society. As I write this I feel a deep sense of uneasiness about individual choice, as I believe that all we can do is in response to inner and outer experience. Inner experience is multilayered and develops out of socialisation and early experiences, which can be largely unconscious and powerful in the present life of the individual. (Rogers, 1951) The context of mourning provides an interactive domain, in which the mourner may feel unable to relate to others. Indeed, Walters (1999) sees a flaw in the postmodern theory of bereavement and argues that,

*' Postmodernism is born of affluence and information technology, both of which nurture autonomous individuals who (think they) know their own minds. Most bereaved people are not like that. They are suffering and confused, may not know how they will get through the next day... .. like the drowning they are more likely to cling to the first life belt thrown them'.* (p.208)

This leads my thoughts to the maxim espoused by Adler (1870-1937) that, *We do the best we can in the circumstances in which we find ourselves.* It is interesting to note that each of the research participants is living a style of life, at the moment of interview, which can be characterised as liminal.

**'Betwixt-and-Between' the rite of passage for a mourner, that can become a way of life.**

The way in which a person lives, that is his/her lifestyle, seems to be powerfully influenced by the experience of loss. In the data, gathered from the interviews I have identified 3 lifestyles. All three can be said to be lifestyles characterised by the notion of 'betwixt and between'.

1. Between childhood and adulthood (Peter Pan syndrome- early loss experience)

*I choose not to grow up*

2. A break in the journey of life (leaving the train and sitting by the river)

*I choose not to move forward*

3. Between the living and the dead. (paranormal)

*I choose to deny that death is final*

Adler rejected Freud's stress on biological and instinctual determination although he did agree that what the individual becomes in adult life is largely as a result of the first six years' experiences. He was in fact interested in the individual's present perception of the past and its continuing influence. He believed in the concept of lifestyle. Everything we do is influenced by our unique lifestyle. Cited in Corey (1997) Adler states that understanding one's lifestyle is like understanding the style of a composer.

*'We can begin wherever we choose: every expression will lead us in the same direction- toward one motive, the one melody around which the personality is built.'*  
*(Adler, 1964a, p.332 in Corey 1997)*

Whilst being doubtful about placing too much prominence on the first six years of life and also not dismissing that notion I feel inclined to borrow the metaphor of lifestyle as being like a style of musical composition. We can begin to understand ourselves when we get to recognise our style of living. It would appear that the notion of lifestyle and its development is dependent on life experience. Can significant loss experience in early life or later in life cause us to develop a lifestyle characterised by the notion of 'betwixt and between'? This may be a lifestyle which is temporary or it may be felt as a permanent style due to powerful early loss experience during a time when the child is malleable and forming a view of the world.

This idea is one which needs further investigation. It came to me as an illumination, whilst being immersed in this study. So, having completed the stages of heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990) and being close to finishing with the creative synthesis, more illumination comes and so the cycle goes on.

## **A Creative Synthesis**

This part of the heuristic research process was achieved through tacit and intuitive powers (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31) I had wanted to present a film of people saying goodbye to each other at Heathrow airport. This was not available and I invite the reader to imagine the scene. Families, lovers, friends, business associates, gather together in the departure area of large international airport. Some separations will be temporary and others permanent. Some are shedding tears, some hugging, some looking into each others' eyes for what seems like an eternity to onlookers. The other side to love and attachment is the chance of separation and loss

### ***The circumstances under which the data was collected and the characteristics of the informants***

As the study progressed I became more and more drawn to the work of the artist Edward Munch, mentioned by one of the participants as significant for him when considering loss. A search through his catalogue revealed a great deal of work that encapsulates, for me, both the beauty of love and the pain of loss.

## **A Visual Essay Depicting the Experience of Loss**

The remainder of the chapter is an essay in images, images created by the artist Edward Munch. I decided that it would be more powerful to present the creative synthesis as a visual essay. I believed that words might interfere with the images shown and felt that this could be a distraction from the impact for each individual viewer. Berger (1972) in his notes to the reader at the front of his text explains why he chooses to offer some essays as pictorial with no information.

*'Sometimes in the pictorial essays no information at all is given about the images reproduced because it seemed to us that such information might distract from the points being made'* (Berger, 1972)

I chose to offer some background information about the life of the artist and leave the images to speak for themselves.

Munch was born in 1863, grew up in Oslo, Norway. His parents, a brother and a sister died while he was still young. His paintings, drawings and prints are stunningly beautiful and also rather bleak. In his life he was described as being rather preoccupied with the darker side of life. The work seems to me to express the loneliness and despair felt by the artist in response to the might of the natural world. He is expressing his feelings and the interaction between the man and the materials he uses speaks again to me in my interaction with his work.

*'I was out walking with two friends- the sun began to set-suddenly the sky turned blood-red. I paused, feeling exhausted, and leaned on a fence. There was blood and tongues of fire above the black fjord and the city. My friends walked on, and there I still stood, trembling with fear and I sensed an endless scream passing through nature'*. (Munch commenting on the context of *The Scream*, Jaster, 2004)

\*Please see ***Munch Creative Synthesis Folder***. (Jaster, 2004) There is a copy of all the images in the file on the CD supplied at the back of the thesis)

## **Illuminations derived from an inner search analysed using an Empirical Phenomenology method**

This part of the results chapter it demonstrates my intention to question taken for granted assumptions about the experience of loss through the process of phenomenological reduction. I used a phenomenological approach to broaden and change and describe the phenomenon of loss. (McLeod, 2001, p.50) In particular focussing on what people do when experiencing loss.

### ***The Circumstances under which the data was collected and the characteristics of the informant.***

I took the 11 illuminations derived from the self -dialogue of the heuristic process and used them as structures or configurations to provide coherence, considering the circumstances of how they occurred, to create clusters. The emphasis in this part of the exploration is on the study of configuration of meaning. This will necessarily involve the structure of the meaning and how it is created. (Von Eckartsberg, 1986) This provides an opportunity to triangulate the study by taking what has evolved from the heuristic experience of it by using the list of illuminations, so far derived to structure the next part of the exploration. (McLeod, 1994 p.91) This afforded another way of using the data from the interviews to discover more about the experience of loss. The heuristic method concentrated on the inner search and in depicting the experience, without losing the people who depict it. I then examined the transcripts of the interviews with the co-participants to see if there was a resonance with the ideas that came to me over the years in the process of illumination, depicted in the self-dialogue. In addition, I abstracted themes from the self-dialogue and looked for



possible connections with the ideas from the illuminations. What I hoped to gain was an essence of the phenomenon of loss from this activity. The method employed to analyse the data was an empirical phenomenological one.

*'The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it.'* (Moustakas 1994, p.13)

Giorgi (1985) writes of two descriptive levels of the approach. At level one is the original, rough data. This comprises of *'.....naive descriptions obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue.'* (Moustakas, 1994 p.13) The data generated from the heuristic interviews and self-dialogue satisfied these criteria. At level two, the process differs from the heuristic process, in that the individual participants were lost and I created a description of the phenomenon of the experience of loss. I concentrated on the research question i.e. what do people do when they experience loss? The role of the researcher, in this method, is to construct and describe the structures of the experience. These are based on reflective analysis and interpretation of the account or story given by the participants in the research. From these individual descriptions of the experience of loss from people who have experienced it I highlighted the essences or structures of the experience of loss.

McLeod (2001) argues qualitative researchers in the field of counselling and psychotherapy, ought to be cognisant of the central implication of Heidegger's (1962; original publication 1927) writings,

*'... ..both phenomenological and hermeneutic sensibilities are necessary components of any attempt to study the dynamics of everyday life' (McLeod, 2001, p.62)*

Heidegger is associated with a research approach that would see these two aspects of method as integral to any study of human experience. I was aware that by examining a phenomenon and focussing in on it, I was in the process of constructing it at the same time as I was trying to grasp what it means. I changed the experience and what it meant to me and others in the process of exploring it. There had to be a consideration of consciousness and experience, as it is central to hermeneutic research. I tried to set aside as much as was possible, my transcendental attitude to the loss experience and 'bracketed off' these assumptions.

So, as I constructed the detailed essential meaning structure within this exploration and write about the idea of phenomenological method I also realise that it is impossible to 'bracket off' (Husserl 1859-1938) the context of my own input and influence and likewise the input of co-participants will have been influenced by the social and cultural context of their lives and the reflexive nature of the self-search and the interview process. However, I aimed to suspend my taken-for-granted assumptions of the everyday natural attitude (*epoche*) that I have towards what constitutes loss and what people do when experiencing a loss and tried to create a description, with all its weaknesses which I hope will capture something of the essence of the experience of loss. I am acutely conscious that language is being used here to describe something which is beyond language. I could only undertake to leave behind what I knew and then came back to it with fresh eyes. If it has resonance for others then I can say it offers a truth, although not claiming any objective truth at all.

The next stage was to go back to the raw data of the interview transcripts and the list of themes from the self-dialogue and list all statements under the headings, created using the list of 11 illuminations from the self- dialogue. From this generation of naïve descriptions listed against the categories arisen from the heuristic study I arrived at a detailed essential meaning structure of the experience of loss. (Von Eckartsberg, 1986)

### **An essential meaning structure of the experience of loss: what do we do when we experience loss?**

When a loss is experienced there can be an overwhelming feeling of being out of kilter with the rest of humanity. It may result initially in a feeling of isolation and feeling totally alone in the world with a sense of abandonment being present along with feeling helpless, very alone and very frightened, all at the same time. New loss may cause a feeling of floundering like a fish out of water, not knowing what to do or where to turn. A feeling as if there is nothing solid to grab hold of, to rely on, of floating, just sort of drifting around.

Sometimes feelings of being stigmatised, lost and odd can lead to a fear of exposure with a lack of ability to communicate how this feels. There may be shame associated with tears and inability to cope with changes in life.

In particular, early loss experience can result in many years of being unable to make satisfying deep attachments. It may also result in feeling unsafe in the world and most fearful of change, always looking for constants and getting niggled or bugged by

people if they change. Paradoxically there may be much moving around, although deep down still not liking change. Being in control of change is important. A strong liking for changes made by the self is felt, but not external changes, beyond self-control.

A loss of home can lead to a strong sense of dislocation.

Then, oddly, at other times when a loss occurs there is a prevailing feeling of complete indifference.

Sometimes those in grief describe the experience of living in an inner world whilst operating in an outer one. This may be expressed in silent tears or much later, grief spilling out onto the floor like a bubbling brook, carried for years, hidden with shame. To the outside world there is competence portrayed and compliments given on how well those experiencing loss can look. Everyday tasks, like holding down a job, can seem impossible characterised by chaos, neglected tasks with a tenuous grip on coping. Those in grief are sometimes hidden behind a strong, high, grey wall where it is impossible for others to reach them. Life, to some seems temporary and insignificant, characterised by emptiness and isolation. Oh, that the world would stop and give reassurances even though the expectations are unreal.

Awareness prevails of an internal dialogue and lack of engagement with the signs from others. Staying inside a little shell and then slowly putting a hand out and touching little things, and then pushing out a bit further. If too much change is evident, escaping back into the shell again. Hiding from the self and not knowing

what to do. Isolation is increased by inability to discuss loss experiences and running away from them. Emotional storms happen with feelings of frustration and anger. There may be awareness that previous relationships characterised by distance in families, are not conducive to discussion around emotional issues like loss.

There is a recognition that early significant loss experience leads to difficulty with personal relationships in adult life. We avoid deep attachment and have difficulty with intimacy in relationships. Promiscuity can become a way of being close in relationships with others. This exploration into sexual intimacy is known tacitly to be compensation for lack of psychological intimacy. It becomes possible to take part in sexual acts without being fully present, due to being sexually still locked up in the self. This dissociation from deeply intimate experiences of a sexual nature may prevent satisfactory and deep relationships from being formed with sexual partners. Relationships characterised by abuse can develop and be maintained for many years without love and respect. The impact of the loss may be huge on willingness to form friendships and feeling vulnerable in relationships and in feeling very angry and rejecting of those around who suddenly change.

Interestingly, some of us form fantasy attachments. These idealised, distant and unobtainable imaginary relationships provide both comfort and opportunities to grieve with a focus on a particular person. It may be someone only encountered briefly or someone seen from a distance. The host body spends days, weeks, months and in some cases years nurturing the relationship and all its 'could bes'. It is a bitter sweet retreat from the actual lived experience and offers a location for wallowing in pleasure and pain. Often this is a very private world of retreat, only shared with a

select few, if any. Unreturned love and all its tragic circumstances can result, should the host body try to pursue this relationship in actual time. A realisation that fantasy love helps survival can be the point at which it isn't needed anymore. Like a defence mechanism, when it becomes conscious it loses its hold and its power.

Loss may be the catalyst for leaving a relationship. Acceptance of loss in life, in its simplicity seems key to the acceptance of self and starting to feel pain of many previous losses.

Dismantling of messages given to us from others in childhood about our self-worth can begin with the loss of a loved one. Feelings of inner tensions and discomfort within the self can be 'jump started' and previously hidden experience becomes noticeable due to the loss, reflecting on the loss and deep personal exploration. Grief may cause a shedding of the false self to reveal an emerging, more real self. Grief can leave no choice but to address deep sadness and explore piled up unexamined losses. The false persona begins to crack and fall with questions about the true identity of the self. In particular, the loss of a parent, never known, may result in a name meaning nothing, the carrying of a label and physical characteristics of someone never met

Loss can bring into question how we interact with the world, the way we perceive the world and make us aware of the reflexive nature of human life. We may find ourselves mourning the idea of someone, rather than they themselves. We may notice some questions about the person, perceived of then and now and notice there's some slippage between the two versions. We may notice that we are changing and becoming more aware that we are changing as a result of the loss and its consequent

explorations. We may discover that core beliefs were just accepted and never examined in the past. We may find ourselves positioned between an 'old self' and an emerging 'new self'. There could be self questions such as, '*Shall I reinvent myself?*' Or '*Do I want to keep any parts of the person; I once was and restructure others?*' A heightened state of awareness prevails with sensitivity to the energies of being. A desire for honest endeavour to be the ethos for the rest of life's journey may emerge. Loss can change the way we think, the way we perceive life, the way we perceive ourselves, just the entire way we live and it can all be changed in the blink of an eye, so to speak.

This dismantling of the false self can lead to monumental change. Destructive relationships may begin to crumble, some survive others do not and some survive for some time in a different form but days are numbered. Being blown away by shock and questioning our courage to face life head on tells us that all our losses have a potential to show us that life is there to be grabbed and lived. Some of us learn for the first time that we can be in the world alone and survive it. We realise that we do not need to rely on another for inner security, in fact it was an illusion that we could. In time, as the more immediate pain subsides, we may notice that we are beginning to become stronger.

The loss can change life dramatically. After major loss experience one feels that life will never be the same again. We may find ourselves changing the way we react to others and we may look out for a potential loss situation again and try to avoid it, fearful of its power. We may even manipulate situations just to avoid coming close to loss possibility again.

The shock of someone leaving or leaving someone can knock one sideways, feeling frozen in time. We decide that if we are to have to experience all this pain then we are going to do it in a way that supports us. Life can become extreme with intensity of pain and the desire for the intensity of pleasure. We feel the need for comfort because we still have to travel this journey with its losses. Some notice a positive commitment to self, no longer treating the self as a second class citizen, if this has been a feature in the past.

The loss of a deep personal relationship can result in new relationships in which new meanings about closeness and intimacy can develop. Others find a move away from a core relationship into many new relationships.

At some point we feel stronger to make decisions about how we want to travel the rest of our journey through life. Stopping and examining the self and the way we behave and function in the world can enable us to identify some areas now seen as strengths that may have been seen as weaknesses.

We may become really grateful for family and friends and try to spend more time together. We may attempt to make everything, every minute as spectacular as we can. It could happen that we start to live in the 'here and now' rather than in the past or worrying about what will happen in the future. There may be a little flame in the mind that is ignited when we think of how little we are and how fragile we are. We start to see how infinitesimally small we are in relation to the whole world. We gain a sense



of perspective and begin to see our own weakness and become aware of our own mortality.

We behave as if we have a grieving self, a kind of sub-personality that remembers all the pain of each life loss and stores it. This grieving self appears to be activated in the event of a new loss and loss becomes conscious. The pain of each loss appears to be compounded by the losses of the past. In the interaction with people, places and things, the loss is located with great intensity and the intensity of it appears to contain the healing.

We behave as if grief work is permanent. The smallest reminder can open up the pain, for example, music, scent or missed birthday card purchasing event. The old saying that 'time can heal pain' is believed and then sometimes the momentary pain of a past loss feels just as great years later as it did when we first experienced it. Overall we accept that the progress of time eases the pain of the past. Yet, if found in some location that rekindles the loss, the pain can feel so fresh and sharp. Alongside ongoing loss we notice ongoing shocks. Some losses, such as, the loss of parents in early life is ongoing for the rest of life, reminded of on Mother's day or Christmas, for example. We live with the knowledge that we can't send cards or buy presents. We think it is a process and we think it doesn't end. There's the actual loss and then the loss of things that will never be, that come up from time to time for ever.

How do we interact with our loss experience on a daily basis? What are the mechanisms for it? What do we find ourselves doing? We behave as if grief located inside us and without us. That is the location for our grief work is in the interaction

between the two. We do not have loss experience, we do it. We construct the loss experience in interaction with people places and things. As learning is thus situated, so is grief work. Sometimes in order to do grief work we seek asylum or create fantasy places and inhabit them. We notice that we try to find ways to do our grief work in our dream worlds. Some of us become more spiritually sensitive or try to seek spiritual knowledge and answers. On an everyday, taken- for granted, seldom questioned or examined level we communicate with the world in which we live. We may carry out this unremarkable, self-healing wise work without conscious awareness and yet feel drawn or compelled to do it just the same. We find ourselves drawn to paintings, music, films, photographs or other images, sounds or objects and notice our interactions with them.

The following describes in more detail examples of the infinite possibilities of the kinds of idiosyncratic experiences that constitute this grief work. Some of it is poetry, included here in the sense that, '*... poetry is not to dazzle us with astonishing thought, but to make one moment of existence unforgettable and worthy of unbearable nostalgia.*' (Kundera, 1991)

### **Diving into Brown Eyes**

*I saw him in the eyes of a potential lover*

*Felt as if my grief was located in the eyes of this other, felt all I had to do was to  
dive into the eyes to tackle my grief*

*Drawn into his deep brown eyes (Hunt, 2004)*

*I questioned the idea of a skin boundary. I always thought my self was inside of my skin and now it feels as if it's located outside of it too, such as in the eyes of another.*

*If self is fluid and located in interaction then maybe loss is in there too.*

*I've observed that in interacting with others I have healed my loss. Now I believe that grief is both inside me and it's without me.*

*I've had relationships, episodes with people in which the loss experience is active. Counselling feels like one way of interacting to heal loss and has been very helpful, many others occur spontaneously.*

*A popular song became a location for my grief. My grief is located in songs, books, novels, films, poems, paintings and photographs. During interaction with cultural processes healing of grief is happening.*

*Grief is located in places and I have strong urges to visit places when in a grief moment. The place holds the grief. It is vivid and alive in that place.*

*I believe that churches and other historical buildings can carry centuries of loss within them. There are many spaces and places where significant loss can be felt and sensed.*

*The notion of home disappeared when my mother died. My sense of home is gone. I imagined it would be there when I needed it, complacently, selfishly and now all of a sudden it's gone.*

*There was also the loss of communication, not being able to write or phone or send cards for Mother's day. The notion of loss expands out to include so many other things.*

*I felt a loss of ideals when my marriage ended. I try to experience things which are noble and contain the human spirit, such as looking at paintings, reading a poem in order to hold onto higher ideals.*

*Loss is felt when pets die, even the humble hamster or distant goldfish and having to give animals away when we moved from place to place because my father was a serviceman.*

*When I cry I cry more for the loss of the cats than my wife. The loss has two centres, my wife and the cats and from those centres the loss has expanded out like a wave to include her extended family and friends.*

*When my daddy died there was a robin always there for my mam, who previously was perched on his spade in the garden or on the gate. She would look out and he would be on the window sill.*

*There was a red admiral butterfly at mammy's funeral lat the end of February, it fluttered down from the coffin and danced around in the vaults and then fluttered down behind a screen at the back of the alter. There were gasps from everybody in the church. They all saw it. Later when walking in the hills near my home in the North*

*East of England in March, feeling sad about the loss of my mam, I saw a red admiral fluttering around.*

*Every time I see my counsellor I revisit the loss.*

*She sanded the bedroom floor and now my memories are invested in the floorboards. Loss includes silly things like pieces of furniture. When I was a child my bedroom was my haven and I got sentimental about little things that I had for a long time and then we would move and I would have to throw them away.*

*My mother gave me a gold pen for my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. So many memories of her are intensely invested in that pen. I regularly revisit that place ... that object.*

*There was a tape that she had taped some records on and the label was in her writing and it brought back an intense feeling in my heart and chest.*

*A whole range of things spark the loss, objects and places. Music like romantic type of music, Celtic music I play constantly.*

### ***Drowning in Grief***

***Moved by a painting of a drowned woman***

***The painting of the drowned woman spoke to me closely***

*The woman spoke to me from the painting, she lay on the beach, washed up and motionless, that was me washed up and motionless, I had been drowning for a long time. The only difference between me and her is that I survived. (Hunt, 2004)*

In the poem above a collision occurred between self and art. We feel compelled to listen to or to look repeatedly at some images or listen repeatedly to some sounds. Suddenly we see the loss come back and hit us quite hard often through objects. Sometimes loss can cause us to focus on an object. Sometimes we focus on images.

*If I think of the death of my mother the images are musical, her singing that particular song, the body that I had to identify, the ring, seeing her in summer dresses or the apron, she always wore in the kitchen, placed in a council flat location.*  
*If I imagine my wife I locate her in a middle class family environment, public school accent, in her work environment and internationally placed.*

The pain in love can be excruciating when rejection is felt. Turning to write poetry brings some catharsis. Poetry offers a location where prose struggles to hold the moment of unbearable nostalgia.

### **Blow out the Candle**

*Blow out the candle, the party's over*  
*I'm spent, beyond redemption, there's no way back*  
*If marriage was just about sex then I'd marry you tomorrow*  
*But it's not*

*My outer skinned peeled off and piled up into a worshipped heap*

*I oozed, my raw flesh glowing red and unprotected*

*He sat behind a strong Perspex shield*

*Pockets bulging with lost loves and lost lives*

*He smiles, drawing the shield a little closer,*

*'Tomorrow I'll take you to a palace'. (Hunt, 2004)*

The cultural objects, sounds and images available to us are, at times, collected. We think of some things as treasure that must be owned and revered in our everyday environments. We like little sentimental objects and become attached to them. Every now and then we hear a tune and we just have to have it. We have to own these songs and they become treasures for us. Sometimes we hear a song a piece of music or see a painting that speaks to us, directly about our life, for example,

*'I love that painting 'The Scream' (Edward Munch) all that torture in one frame. It reflects one instant of time for me. It's wonderful. I have a copy in my flat. I see myself echoed in art and music and I have to own it, have it myself and take it home with me. I don't know if it is to keep it away from the rest because I see myself in it.'*  
*(survivor of childhood abuse)*

This literal, but silent cry from the battlefield of existence knows how to survive in this cultural location of the reproduction of a popular image.

Sometimes children break the rules of convention, because they are not knowing of them and bound by them, in attempts to make sense of loss experience. The following

story brings into mind the fairy stories of *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Princess and the Golden Ball*. In *The Sleeping Beauty*, the Princess is woken from a sleep of a hundred years by a handsome prince. In *The Princess and the Golden Ball*, a princess plays with a golden ball which is kept by a frog until she agrees to kiss him and he then turns into a handsome prince, having previously been turned into a frog by a wicked witch.

### **An Irish Wake**

*My mam was waked in her little cottage and the cottage was so small that we couldn't get a coffin in, so she was waked in her bed.*

*At my mam's funeral my sister's two older girls sang this beautiful Gaelic song and it was just so magical, they sang like angels, this gorgeous lilting song that was just breathtaking.*

*My 6 year old niece kept trying to put a toy frog in the bed with her dead grandma. My mam would have laughed and said, 'lying in the wake with the rosary beads around my hand and this frog tucked in the blankets'. (derived from N, 2004)*

The child's attempts to get the frog into the grandma's bed are seen as delightful and inappropriate to the adults at the wake. Often children make very serious attempts to work on loss in locations, which are not recognised, facilitated or respected by adults, due to lack of awareness.



We turn now in this description of loss experience and what we do when experiencing loss from visual art, music, poetry and story as locations for grief work to the largely unexplored activity involving photographs as a location for doing loss.

Process of loss with all its phases and changes can be mapped onto what people do with photographs of lost loved ones. One person collected every photo of him within 24 hours of his death and placed them in a brown envelope with his name on the front. Moving photographs from one place to another can be an expression of a change in the process of loss. A young widow can grieve for the time when the photograph of her wedding day with her young husband will be replaced with a new one in the future. It may be that intervention into the physical process of moving the photograph could interfere with the process of loss. It seems that what people do with photographs is very important in the healing process of loss.

A recently divorced woman has no photographs of her former husband and wonders at the lack of it (he is the keeper of the family photographs)

One stepbrother had all the photographs of the family and he threw them away, to the distress of his brother, who only has one photograph of his mother and none displaying their relationship. He mourns that there is nothing at all that time from being a baby through to 21 years old of himself and his mother together. When he goes to other people's houses and they have black and white photographs of their parents and grandparents he has a feeling of no roots. So photographs provide a record of a relationship and offer location in a family. When they are unavailable the loss can be felt keenly.

Sometimes after a new loss it can be disturbing to have photographs and cards around but at the same time not wanting to throw them away just because they are acting as too powerful memories. Some collect their photographs and put them away into drawers or other places out of sight. Not all photographs are so painful to see. Some can be handled because of strong personal memories of being in the place in the image and this means that the owner of the photograph can de-focus from the image of the lost loved one, but other photographs we cannot have around.

Sometimes when we have lost a sense of feeling safe as a child we become very attached to others and carry photographs to gain some kind of comfort and security  
*'My sister is my closest friend I always carry a photograph of her in my wallet (let down by parents feeling the loss of a safe childhood)*

Taking photographs of the dead is seen as unseemly, unless you are a celebrity and photographed for the media to portray your image to the masses.

*'When mam died she was waked in a cottage and because it was so tiny they couldn't get a coffin in and she was just lying on the bed and she looked so beautiful and young, she looked lovely and I almost wanted to take a photograph, somebody else suggested it too. I wanted to take a photograph and send it to people who couldn't come to the funeral but my sisters and brother were horrified, so I thought I'd better not. There are always photographs..... every transition for people is marked isn't it? It's a celebration, in a sense, of someone's life'.*

Grief can also lead to the desire for asylum. Some escape into work, or the world of ideas and the intellect. Some seek physical separateness. Sometimes it is important to

leave a relationship to be alone, not to shelter with another. Actions in the home can be to create safety and some roots under self-control.

The seeking of asylum can be manifested as a deep need for a private life, in which the life is closely guarded territory. People can only come into our lives invited and allowed. We can be quite secretive escaping to be alone every now and then.

*'I go up to the mountains in Scotland and paint, take a wee tent and think things through'.*

Sometimes we have to be physically alone with the feeling that people pollute our time. They can contaminate the time we need to put things in boxes, categories and relax and be alone. For some, when at an emotional peak, when we are really traumatised, we can't cope with people distracting us. In particular some develop a creative, and a very individual means for dealing with pain alone like the short description that follows.

*'I have this little thing I go through, I wouldn't be able to put it into words. I do things step by step. I have these steps that I follow to get myself back to normal.' (sequence of movements observed in this participant)*

Some of us create fantasy places and inhabit them. One person spoke of art therapy that involved depictions of fantasy places that were locations for her losses and they enabled interaction and some healing of her losses

For others there may be opportunities to make sense of loss in our dream worlds. We dream of lost loved ones in perfect worlds, with meetings and discussions. Sometimes the dreams are unpleasant and in some cases nightmares or worst of all recurring nightmares.

*'Sometimes night times can be hard I have a recurring nightmare, a clown chasing me. I'm frightened of clowns. The dream has occurred since I was little and the clown has a tear and I see it's really false, it's a lie, somewhere beneath the mask, the make-up and the wig they're hiding. Underneath the whole charade there is a person. He's got a big knife and I'm running away, there is fairground music playing but it's all discord, I'm running and he's catching me, I run around the corner and there's a bin, like a wheelie bin size, but it was just a bin and I climb into it, pull the lid over and I'm hiding, my heart's thumping and I'm terrified with fear and he runs past and I'm watching through the gap in the lid. He runs about five paces, stops and looks and then the big smile and he runs over and just pushes the lid off and I wake up and I'm absolutely rigid with fear, terrified and it's happened right through my life. Every now and then it comes back and I don't know what it's about.'* (An adult survivor of childhood physical and emotional abuse from father, identifies loss of a safe childhood and describes his recurring nightmare)

*'I also dream of a woman with a face like an egg. It's a porcelain face, but it's flat, there are no features. I've only had it a few times and it is less frightening than the clown dream'* (The same person as above, who also spoke of an abused mother powerless to stop abuse by father)

Those in grief after death sometimes turn to a spiritual path and try to seek spiritual knowledge and become spiritually sensitive. In particular, one person spoke of feeling a spiritual presence with a sensation of her hair being stroked. She described speaking to him, as a spirit and asking him what he wanted and was he ok? Space and place can feel sacred after the death of a loved one.

Some describe loss as not feeling like loss at all because we are so sure that the spirit of the dead one is with us and closely guiding us. So, some losses do not fit into the text book pattern of what a loss is supposed to be.

Some believe that spirits make it happen when you need those reminders and those signs that they are not really gone. We speak of communication from the spirit world through scents and sensations alongside sounds and images. Some of us regularly chat to our dead loved ones and get comfort from doing so.

There is a North American Indian group who see the completion of life at adolescence, so that when you become an adult you become a complete person and therefore, when you go.... You can go into spirit and that's OK because you have completed what you need to in this world. In our civilization it's linear it's not cyclical.

Some consult with tarot card readers and clairvoyants and believe that they are communicating with dead loved ones.

'She said, *Your dad's here* She said he was really upset and was saying *sorry and he's got a present for you, it's on the table pick it up...* and she said *it's a red rose*. I picked it up and sniffed it.'

Apart from an untimely death some feel comfortable with the idea that death is part of life and believe strongly in a spiritual after life, giving out of the body experiences and near-death experiences as evidence of its existence. Some turn to eastern philosophy and religions for comfort and knowledge. Others turn to religion and new ways of seeing the spiritual domain of life within a western culture for new ways of thinking about the life that's left for the mourners.

This ends the essential meaning structure of the experience of loss. That is, what we do when we experience loss. The following section attempts to locate this essential meaning structure temporally, socially and culturally.

### **The Context of the Essential Meaning Structure**

The research participants all live in the North East of England. They comprise of two males and two females. The two females are counsellors and the two males both professionals in managerial roles. They age between 26 years and 51 years. All are educated at least to Advanced level in the school system and two to Masters Degree level and one has a Doctorate.

Three of the participants are aware of the work of Bowlby (1971) on attachment theory and two have knowledge of current stage models of grief (Parkes, 1972)

The interviews were carried out over the last six years. One person used most of the interview time to talk about the idea of loss of a safe childhood. This had been provoked by the opportunity to be listened to by an interviewer with counselling skills and a then current TV advertising campaign to make the public more aware of hidden child abuse. The adverts on the TV had been particularly disturbing and many complaints were made about them to the NSPCC. This participant later described them as very upsetting and felt as if he had been re-abused by them.

Another participant had recently been through a particularly painful separation and divorce and was seeing a counsellor. This, I feel certainly influenced his ideas about self search and the impact of this loss, in his life. The influence of the counselling experience was interspersed with the impact of the loss itself.

Another participant was not currently experiencing deep pain through loss and talked about times in her life when loss had been more difficult than others. She spoke of a murdered friend and the long term impact that had on her and on her attitude to life. The timely death of both parents she found in the natural order of things. In this case she referred to the prevailing idea in our culture that life should be long and the longer the better. The death of those in youth or through having their life taken unnaturally went against this natural order of things.

My own contribution to this study is influenced by the fact that I am a 51 year old, professional woman with many years experience both as a counsellor and play therapist. I have experienced the death of two brothers both in their mid-thirties and the death of a dearly loved father. I am situated in a higher education context, with

access to much knowledge and experience of the human condition. I am recently divorced and undergoing major changes in lifestyle at present. I have taught play therapy in an African context and know enough about that to know that what I accept as real and normal is culturally located. Overall, what I am saying is that I can only see this study through the eyes that I have with the experience of life that I have and I know it is therefore constructed through the lens that I have to see the world through, a lens that is in a state of change at all times. What I choose to hear, attend to and write about it is located in time, my social context and within the many cultures that I inhabit, accepting that no culture is monolithic. Gergen (1989) writes about this poetically,

*'What we take to be the dimensions of the self in the present era may be viewed, in part, as the accumulated armamentarium of centuries of debate. They are symbolic resources, as it were, for making claims in a sea of competing world constructions.'*  
(p.75)

Accepting all the above and the limitations to my understandings as a human, constructed in her time and place, I would like to write about what appears, to me, to be interesting about the experience of loss from this study so far.

It appears from this study that we behave as if grief located inside us and without us. I am aware of an interaction with people, places and objects, in which I would say the grief experience is located within the interaction. If the self is fluid and located in interaction (Gergen, 1989) then loss could be located there too. Bruner (1990) would say learning is located in interaction, so why not loss too? The following is a short



description that contains what we notice about loss that seems to say something new about it.

**What I notice about the experience of loss that seems to be something new to say about it**

We notice that grief is life long and not necessarily pathological. We believe that our grief is our own and therefore idiosyncratic in nature. Books we read about the theory of grief speak to us although we are aware of them as simplistic. We sometimes search for models of loss in an attempt to plot ourselves in the process. We may feel wise and realise that all along we have held the key to our own healing. The agency and wisdom of the mourner is missing in and is not acknowledged in prevailing models of grief and the grieving process, which we find in books. Slowly we become aware that mourning is a healing process. By being in the world and interacting in the world we work at grief. We work at grief when watching TV, reading a novel, involved in a love affair, friendship, putting a photograph in a frame or a wallet, listening to music, talking, having sex, walking, being silent, accepting a caress, visiting a place.... The list is endless. All human activity provides opportunity and location for grief work. The definition of grief work could be much broader than it is. We see loss both as compounded loss over the years and yet each loss as separate and different from the others. Sometimes there are overlaps in the commonality of experiences we have of loss. On an everyday lived experience level we know that the experience of loss goes on inside us but it is more than an intrapersonal one. It is also interpersonal, physical, spiritual and cultural.

So, what are the implications of this new awareness and knowledge about loss? If we behave as if grief is permanent a new model that sees grief as life long and as a natural part of living could be helpful. The concept of pathology is the result of a medical model of grief. Life long grief could be seen as part of normal human development

At this point I re-assert the idea that each of us has a ***grieving self***, which is permanent, contains a cumulative store of pain and is ready when needed to become active, to take part in the natural process of healing. It is located in a timeless dimension of the constantly changing, fluid self, a self that is not just located within the skin boundary but within interaction between the host body and the rest of the world. It is functional and should be acknowledged and trusted as a natural mechanism for self-healing.

The next section describes the exploration of loss in childhood. Following this the literature on the experience of loss was examined and I evaluated all results against it.

## **Ethnographic Study**

### **Children and the experience of loss**

#### ***The Circumstances under which the data was collected and the characteristics of the informants***

I looked at case study evidence, evidence from school teaching, evidence from the self-search and the interview transcripts to enrich this ethnographic method.

In this section, I explored some personal experiences I have had with children both as a teacher in primary school and as a play therapist. The results indicate that children have the wisdom to know what they need to interact with in order to deal with loss experience and to self-heal in the process. The first section deals with teaching and play therapy data gathered in ethnographic method using field notes and case notes and the final part is a detailed case study of a child experiencing the loss of his mother through death and in play therapy.

### **Childhood Grief**

If it is a human capacity to heal the self through locating grief in the interaction between the self with its external chosen location then, when does this capacity for seeking location for grief in words, images or music begin? What evidence is there in childhood? In addition to data gathered in working both as a primary school teacher and a play therapist there is also therapeutic literature to suggest that children interact in deep and meaningful ways with story to cope with and to move through therapeutic process. (Oaklander, 1978, Gersie, 1997 & Cattanach, 1997,)

Bettleheim, (1976) in his seminal work, *The Uses of Enchantment*, writes about the role of the fairy tale and the existential predicament. He gives an example,

*'For example, many fairy stories begin with the death of a mother or father; in these tales the death of a parent creates the most agonising problems, as it (or the fear of it) does in real life. (p.8)*

Bettleheim, a psychoanalyst analyses the fairytale and the enchantment process as a response to,

*'The deep inner conflicts originating in our primitive drives and our violent emotions are all denied in much of modern children's literature, and so the child is not helped in coping with them.'* (1976, p.10)

Whilst I would not necessarily agree with a theory that states that we are experiencing such inner conflicts, being more persuaded by humanistic views of the human being and the development of personality e.g. Rogers (1951), I would agree that some modern children's literature does avoid the more disturbing emotions a child experiences in grief but maybe the most successful writers do enable the child to locate deep emotional experience within the covers. The current success of J. K. Rowling is many faceted and I would not claim to have cracked the formula for its popularity with children. However, on visiting a child experiencing difficulty with coping with bereavement after the death of her mother, the eight year old selected the array of 'Harry Potter' books on her bedroom shelf and said 'Do you know about Harry Potter?' I nodded, she continued, 'Well he's an orphan and she writes about dead people'. On her first visit to the play therapy project set up to offer play therapy to bereaved children, she came clutching a 'Harry Potter' book. She too, although not technically an orphan, felt herself to be one as her father had abandoned her before birth. Whilst struggling with the loss of both parents she had found a story that linked herself concretely to the book. She was without a doubt enchanted by the story.

Bettelheim, (1976) argues that,

*'The delight we experience when we allow ourselves to respond to a fairy tale, the enchantment we feel, comes not from the psychological meaning of the tale (although this contributes to it) but from its literary qualities- the tale itself is a work of art. The tale could not have its impact on the child were it not first and foremost a work of art'* (p.11)

Such an author is Raymond Briggs, for he is first and foremost an artist. He wrote the story of 'The Snowman'. More accurately, he drew the story. Joanna Carey, journalist writing for the Guardian, describes Briggs in the following way,

*'He has enchanted us all with Bettelheim, (1976) the ultimate in lyrical childhood fantasy, in which without words, the tenderly observed drawings of a little boy in his pyjamas are magically enhanced by the use of coloured crayons, which gently suggest the familiar textures of the child's immediate world and the infinite power of his imagination.'* (Guardian, 06.01.03, p.36)

The Snowman was published in 1978. This story was preceded by *'Fungus the Bogeyman'*, (1977) In the above article, Briggs describes the ending of the writing of Fungus as 'after two years of being immersed in slime'. In 1971 both his parents died and in 1973, two years before he began to write Fungus, his wife, Jean, of ten years, who had suffered from schizophrenia, died too. (TES, 09.10.98, p.11) Briggs is quoted in the Guardian article as saying he needed to work on *'something clean and pleasant'*.

Nicolette Jones, journalist writing for the TES, argues that it is possible this personal history of tragedy and loss could explain the dark side that can be found in the happiest of books. She writes of children being befriended and then deserted. She gives examples, including, the snowman melting at the end of the story. Briggs answers this by saying that departures solve the problem of form and in addition he does not believe in

*'Happily ever after'*. In the same article, Jones, (1998) further argues that *The Snowman* has a place in the collective consciousness. She describes Briggs as, '.....the man who did for snowmen what Disney did for mice'.

Bearing in mind that, *The Snowman* (1978) has an ending which is not *'Happily ever after'*, and a child is befriended and deserted, it is most poignant to know that this very story was selected by a child of three, going through the process of bereavement after the death of her mother as a story in which her grief was located. As the older child, arriving for Play Therapy, had clutched the *'Harry Potter'* book to her as a concrete representation of the issue of being an orphan, so too did the younger child, in a school nursery class, clutch the copy of *The Snowman* (1978) to her for a period of weeks, as a concrete representation of grappling with the permanence of death. She became fixated on the last image in the story. The last page has a drawing of the little boy looking at the melted snowman. There is a hat and a scarf on the ground and a small heap of snow with some coal and a carrot. She would ask over and over again, 'Is he dead?' no amount of explaining about snow and its material properties and the fact that it was a story and that a snowman in real life could not be alive or dead consoled her. Her capacity to verbalise her grief was hampered by immature development of her speech and language skills and understanding, due to a very

premature delivery to enable her sick mother to have chemotherapy. However, the story was a powerful one. She had selected it herself and it contained the dark side of life. This kind of story, Bettelheim, (1976) argues, is essential for psychological health and normal development. He asks that,

*'The child most particularly needs to be given suggestions in symbolic form about how he may deal with these issues (**the struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable**) and grow safely into maturity'. (1976 ,p.8 ) (The bold is incorporated from the same page to denote what the issues are.)*

I would go further than Bettelheim (1976) to suggest that children in addition to being offered texts that are not avoidant of existential problems, that children in need when grieving have a capacity, a kind of innate wisdom to connect with stories that do offer this kind of experience. They locate their grief in the interaction between themselves and the text. So, what they need is exposure to many texts and also freedom to choose and to choose the same text as many times as is needed to make sense of their grieving experience, for example the child described above, who needed to understand what irreversible loss means. The innate wisdom of the child to know what they need should be respected.

The same child, who clung to book, *'The Snowman'* was also able to locate her life experience in a short film, shown in the nursery she attended. She was in the process of being adopted by her mother's aunt, shortly after the death of her mother. She was three years old. The class were watching a short nature documentary on the life of a baby squirrel. The squirrel became orphaned when his mother was shot by hunters.

He was found, quite by chance, by a BBC camera man, who took the young squirrel back to his home to hand rear him. He decided to film the process of caring for him. It soon became clear that the squirrel was not going to survive being hand fed by the man. He decided, as he had a cat, which had recently given birth to kittens, that the cat may take to the baby squirrel and feed it. His attempts to unite the cat and baby squirrel were successful and the cat reared the young squirrel. There were many amusing scenes when the growing squirrel caused mayhem in the house by eating flowers and making nests out of tissue paper in the mixing bowl. The group of nursery children howled with delight at the unfolding scenes. The bereaved child, in the process of being adopted, stood up and pointed at the screen with profound intensity in her expression and kept repeating *'I was born, I was born, I was born'*. There was no doubt in my mind that she had located her experience in the film. She was being adopted by her aunt, who already had two children and her mother had died too, just like the squirrel. The child did not have the vocabulary to say all that. She could not articulate it in words but she was desperate to communicate to me, her teacher, that she could recognise herself in this story.

My own experience of childhood loss was triggered by a poem. I attended a writer's workshop in London facilitated by the American/Irish Poet Michael Donaghy.

Michael introduced me to a poem that I was emotionally moved by and found myself repeatedly turning to it. As with the child in the example given above I was compelled and drawn back to the poem over and over again. The poem that brought about this process in me is as follows:



### ***The Story of the White Cup***

*I am not sure why I want to tell it  
Since the cup was not mine and I was not there,  
and it may not have been white after all.  
When I tell it, though, it is white, and the girl  
To whom it has just been given, by her mother,  
Is eight. She is holding a white cup against her breast,  
and her mother has just said goodbye, though those  
could not have been, exactly, the words. No one knows  
what her father has said, but when I tell it,  
he is either helping someone very old with a bag,  
a worn valise held in place with a rope,  
or asking a guard for a cigarette. There is, of course,  
no cigarette. The cattle trucks stand with their doors  
slid back. They are black inside, and the girl  
who has just been given a cup and told to walk  
in a straight line and told to look like she wants  
a drink of water, who screamed in the truck  
all the way to the station, who knew at eight,  
where she was going, is holding a cup to her breast  
and walking away, going nowhere for water.  
she does not turn, but when she has found water,  
which she does, in all versions of the story, everywhere,*

*she takes a small sip of it, and swallows.*

*Roger Mitchell for Helen (date unknown)*

When I thought about the sadness that this evoked in me, I concluded that it was because the poem was about a mother and father taking an opportunity to save their child's life in desperate circumstances. The price they paid was never to see her again and knowing that they would not be there for her in life. On a cognitive level this explanation satisfied me. I was moved to tears but felt unable to express this within the group of strangers where I first heard the poem read aloud.

As time went by I began to come to different layers of understanding and realised that the part of me that is always grieving, that it, the *grieving self*, was touched by this experience and I had begun to interact with it. When I was a young child I spent some time separated from my parents and I have come to realise that this early separation had had a profound affect on my life. This poem enables me to revisit that loss and to express some of the sadness from that time through *aesthetic distance* (Grainger, 1990). This is in essence a paradoxical process because I can come closer to my issues of concern through the distance created in this poem about the life of another. The poem contains a metaphor that I recognise. In this way I seek out the experiences I need from the cultural array surrounding me (Carrithers, 1992) and through this process begin to process some of my early childhood experiences.

Cattanach (2003) explains that when a child plays with toys and other materials and dramatises the play or narrates a story, then the child is safely distanced from the real

world. Through the process of *aesthetic distance* the child can begin to look at painful and difficult emotions connected with the experience. Both as a primary school teacher and later as a play therapist I have been conscious of how sophisticated a child's play and story making can be. Whilst training to be a teacher I was keen to encourage creative writing. My tutor assured me that it was unnecessary to teach young children to write poetry. His advice was to give them an environment rich in poetry and in their own time they will begin to compose poems and leave them on my desk or slip them into my pocket, as had been his experience. The teaching practice lasted six weeks and there was no sign of spontaneous poetry despite the rich provision. Finally, I resorted to a writing frame using a four-line simile structure.

*My... (loved one) is like a piece of furniture*

*My... (loved one) is like a time of day*

*My ... (loved one) is like a piece of fruit*

*My ... (loved one) is like an animal*

After a few minutes, Roland, a six year old child, put down his pencil. I looked at his writing; I was unable to read it, as it was illegible. I asked him to read it to me. He obliged.

*My Grandmother*

*My grandmother is like a chest full of fish that you cannot move.*

*She's not like any time of day .*

*She's like night*

*She's not like any kind of fruit*

*She's like a stone*

*She's not like any kind of animal*

*She's like a dead one*

I was astounded by the sophisticated imagery in Roland's poem. He hadn't given it a lot of thought but it was extremely powerful. Knowing that Roland was a child with an elderly father, in his early seventies and his grandmother was in her early nineties, I felt the portrayal of the old lady was beautiful. So, although his technical skill in writing was not well developed he had shown himself wise and a keen observer of life. This child experienced some difficulty with relating to other children as he was considered educationally weak by his teacher and he was culturally in a different world to children his own age with younger parents. I believe that the poem provides evidence of his capacity to deal with the difficulty of his young life through the process of aesthetic distance.

Play therapy is offered to children instead of counselling because play is the place where children recognise the separateness of themselves and the rest of the world. It is in play that children develop a sense of the world that is beyond the self. Playing in the presence of another by creating a fictional world can be the best way to make sense of their real world. (Cattanach, 2003)

The remainder of this chapter will comprise of a case study of a grieving child in play therapy. The case study will include many examples of the child interacting with

images, form, story and birds as locations for his grief work. The case study includes notes from early sessions and notes from later sessions.

## **The Case Study**

### ***The circumstances under which the data was collected and the characteristics of the informants***

The case study was constructed from the case notes and video footage of a client of mine in Play Therapy. He was seen over a period of two years and the study focuses on the early experiences in therapy and the final experiences.

## **Background**

This child, to be known as G, was referred by hospice staff to the project offering counselling to children who have or are about to experience bereavement. He was 10 years and 8 months old at the time of the referral. I saw him for over two years. We had forty sessions together. His mother was being treated for terminal Cancer. A home visit was arranged to assess the situation and to take a report to a Therapy Panel, who would decide whether or not counselling would be a suitable intervention. It was thought that because of the age of the child that a play therapy approach would be the most suitable, should the family be in a position to support the intervention

The home visit also involved the completion of a self-evaluation questionnaire by the child and the parent/carer of the child. Play therapy was offered and a pre-therapy evaluation questionnaire was offered, and then again at the end of therapy. The questionnaire had been carefully designed by me and a play therapist colleague working within this project for bereaved children. It is based on the concepts of

‘well-being’ and ‘involvement’ as Person-centred counsellors we are conscious that we work holistically with the children and are not problem-focussed. Consequently the aim of therapy is to establish a psychologically safe and therapeutic relationship, based on the Rogerian Core Conditions of empathy, acceptance and congruence (Rogers, 1957), in order for therapeutic growth to occur. Therefore the evaluation of the client work in this project addresses the holistic growth of the individual and does not focus on the bereavement symptoms

It was noted at the home visit that G was moderately happy but with low mood swings. He was very concerned about any changes to his life. He was moderately self-confident and displaying a fighting spirit. He believed that he could stand up for himself. His mother and aunt believed that he found it extremely difficult to relax and he was very rarely peaceful. He also found it very difficult to express emotional pain. He was able to have fun, at times. In school he was having some difficulty with concentrating but still keen to explore and find out about new things. He was having great difficulty going to sleep at night and was awake early in the morning. He was experiencing some tummy aches, panics, breathing quickly and these seemed to be related to his mother’s feelings of pain and feeling sick. He had a rash on his head that had been diagnosed as psoriasis. He was very worried about the prospect of maybe having to go to a children’s home. He expressed a desire to stay in his own house. He was having intrusive disturbing thoughts and he found that running around a lot helped with those.

The sessions were video-filmed, with written consent from the parent and verbal consent from the child. The films were taken to supervision sessions and used for teaching and research purposes.

### First Session

The themes of the session were strength, safety, containment and enclosure. G spent some time looking around the room and played with the water. We sat to go through contracting, confidentiality and safety issues. He said that he did not know anyone who was being hurt and I explained that that was good but if in the future he did know that and told me then I would have to let someone else know. I also explained that if I was concerned about his safety that I would have to let somebody else know. He said that, *'I only come to close to death when I go to see the poisonous snakes, but Colin always makes me go out of the room when he wants to take them out of their tanks'*. I was aware of the mention of the word 'death' in his response to possible concerns over his safety.

Most of the time was spent in the sand. G. constructed enclosures for different reptiles to live in and the scene changed over the session as he constructed, animals broke out and water escaped. He worked tirelessly to hold the whole thing together and the outcome was that the mother was saved, the father was saved and the child was saved. I was very aware of the struggle he had to contain a chaotic situation. I reflected to him throughout the session the desperateness of the struggle to contain the water. We took some photographs of the scene before we took it apart, at my suggestion.

## Second Session

G. wanted to paint a picture. I assisted him with the materials and encouraged him to be independent in using them. The theme of the session was fear of the loss of security in the future and the inevitability of it.

The painting was a seascape in which he painted a sun rising above the horizon. He had difficulty with the horizon and said that he did not like what was on it. He also talked about the tide coming in on the beach and the power of the waves. There was a castle made of sand (like the one he made last week in the sand tray) It had strong walls and was very secure, but G. was aware of the inevitability of the tide coming in and the castle being destroyed. Eventually, the security will disappear.

He said that he liked to go to the beach with his Mum and that the sea in X was always rough. The waves were huge and splashed onto the rocks. He said he had seen a castle on the sand like this one and the tide was coming in, the people who had built it had left and the sea was coming in and flooding the castle. He said that if there were people inside the castle, then they could be drowned or eaten by a shark.

On the beach there was also a starfish. He said that it was poisonous and could sting people. It had crept out of the sea and it was going to be taken back in by the tide. He said that the starfish could make your arm swell up or give you a rash.



I do not know what the symbolism in his painting meant to him. However, it was constructed purposely and with deep concentration. I also believe that the client has the wisdom to know what symbolism or metaphors are the one's that he or she needs to bring about the healing process. I assisted his process by reflecting to him both on the construction of the work and on the narrative that accompanied it. I believe that the process and the narrative that was constructed in parallel contained the therapeutic power to heal his pain.

We took 'Polaroid' photos of the painting and of each other besides the painting. He chose to keep the picture of me and one of the painting. He took the painting home to his Mum. He said he would ask her if he could put it on the wall. He said it was the best painting that he had ever done. It was a highly significant piece of work to him.

### **Third Session**

The Themes of this session were the themes of containment and trying to hold things together by repairing the cracks was still evident in his play. I am sure if it was helpful to suggest using a material that could hold water. He was working with absorbed concentration before I suggested the plastic coated material to line the pond in the sand. I think I was trying to rescue him. On reflection with my supervisor she believed that it had been the right thing to do. I was not rescuing him but assisting him in finding the right material do be able to control the events in his narrative.

He was talking about learning to cook and to sew with his Mum's sister, Auntie D. It felt like an opportune time to mention the fact that Auntie D. and his Mum had discussed the future and when she died it was agreed that Auntie D. would look after

him. *(I had previously spoken with the family about this and explained that I needed to know about the future arrangements. in case it came up in the work. In fact on the home visit when G had said that he was very worried about having to go to a Children's Home. It was explained to me that he knew about the future plans.)*

He said that he did not know about the plans made. He also said that his Granddad had liver cancer and recovered and that that had given him hope about his Mum. I was aware that although he had been told about the plan to live with his Aunt and that his Mum was dying he had chosen to deny the information. I respected his right to keep himself safe and did not challenge him on these points.

G. made a decoration for the pond. He said that it was like one he made for his Mum and he had sewn it out of fabric. It was a circular shape with a pink heart in the middle. He wanted to look for animals that were not dangerous. He settled for elephants, saying that they were the least dangerous.

We also made floating 'life rafts' for anyone who needed them. I was aware of his need for a place to feel safe.

He wanted photographs of his sand world. The water was contained within the structure he made. He seemed less agitated and much calmer than the previous sessions when the water had overpowered the structure constructed or had the potential to in the painting.

He wanted a photograph of me, and he gave me one of him and one of his 'world.'

#### Fourth Session

We began the session by my apologizing for not being there last week and the session having to be cancelled. G. said 'So you had to go down London'. He had been told by his Aunt that my brother was very ill and I felt that he wanted to give an opportunity for that to be voiced at the beginning of the session. I explained to him that I had to go and see my brother because he was very ill and that he was going to have chemotherapy soon. I thought he would then understand the seriousness of it and realise that I had not abandoned him without great cause. He said 'Like me Mam'. He then told me that he found out suddenly that his Mum was very ill when he returned from the play scheme one day. He knew because an ambulance had come to take her to the hospital. I said, 'That must have been a shock' and he said, 'yes'. He said it was 8 months ago since that happened. She had been ill for much longer but it was only in the last 8 months that he had known about it. It seemed to me that the self-disclosure about my brother's illness had enabled him to talk a little about how he found out about the seriousness of his mother's condition. It was a brief interaction and I felt, a very significant one.

G decided to paint a picture for his friend C. C is an adult friend who owns many snakes and lizards. G. spends time with him and handles the animals. He is going to get a snake for Christmas. His Uncle A is making him a tank. Uncle A will take on the care of G. with Auntie D in the event of his mother's death.

Whilst he was painting the picture he demonstrated that he had learnt how to make 'Donald Duck' noises and 'Donald Duck' motor bike noises. It felt as though he was trying to impress me with this new- found skill.

He also talked about how brave a friend thought he was touching a snake briefly. He said 'People at school think I'm getting a snake to be brave but I like the patterns on them'. I reflected that he was interested in them because they were beautiful animals. I have a feeling that he wants me to be impressed by his understated bravery. He said his friend was boasting about being brave enough to touch the snake just briefly. He on the other hand is implicitly brave. It very much feels like he wants me to see him as a hero. He acknowledges that C is much braver than he is and that he only feels safe enough to touch the snakes when C is there. I am aware of a kind of adolescent need to assert his masculinity. I am also aware that he needs to perceive of himself as implicitly brave in order to face the future.

At the end of the session he asked to take photographs of the painting. Once again, there was a picture of the work and one with me and the work. The other was one of the work and one of him with the work. He wanted the picture of me and I was offered the picture of him

### **Fifth Session**

This was the first meeting with G after his mother's death, which happened a fortnight before. I started the session by saying that I was very sorry to hear about his Mum dying. He responded by staring at me until I looked down. He looked very angry. His grandmother told me, before the session that he was very angry with God for taking his Mummy and he was also upset that she had been cremated. I then said that he could choose what to do. He said he hadn't thought about it. I suggested after some silence, that we both start with some play dough. I spent the time softening and

warming the dough so he could work with it. He produced a tableau of his Uncle T (Mum's brother) with a paint gun and described a fight in which he had 'splatted' the van and T had asked him to clean it up and had 'splatted' him in the process. This story was told with a smile, the first of the session. He then wrote out an announcement. 'In the summer there will be a fight between the paint guns and the water guns and the water guns will win.' He then wrote out a personal challenge to Uncle T guaranteeing that he will beat him. There were many metaphors for fighting. It felt as if he was channelling the anger there.

He noticed the heart sculpture that he made last year and I asked him if he wanted to take it home. He had made it for his Mum. He also told me that he had bought some flowers for his Mum yesterday and written her a little card.

He took photographs of the tableaux. He took one with me and I offered him one of him too. He wanted to take the picture of himself and of me. He said I could choose. However, I was aware that he wanted the picture of me. He had it in his hand and was moving it towards the card he had made.

At the end we discussed the holiday coming up. 'So, we will not meet until 3 weeks time.' I asked him if he still wanted to come. He said 'Yes'. I also talked to him about the beginning of the session. I asked him if he thought that I was trying to make him to talk about his Mum. He said yes and I assured him that I would never do that and that the playing together alone will be enough to help him with his experience. He seemed re-assured by this.

## Sixth Session

G. returned today after 3 weeks break. G told me that he had been ill for about a month. It's about a month since his Mum's funeral. He had a slight cough. He also told me that he had trodden on the carpet grip on the stairs whilst they were waiting for a carpet to be delivered, and fallen. He was limping and he said that he had knocked his face too. I was aware that he looked very pale.

He came with the intention of making a parachute. He proceeded to make it. He named it *Extreme Sports* and said it had to be able to hold a man and to float down rather than crash down.

I helped him by cutting strips of Sellotape and being of practical assistance. He told me that he was going out in the evening for a meal with Uncle T, as it was his holiday from work. The themes of safety, risk and danger were apparent. He talked about someone he knew in the past dying from the sniffing of glue, as he opened the glue stick. My sense is that he is aware of the fragility of life and of all the dangers in the everyday environment and the risk of living that is there every day. A kind of existential awareness seems to be there with him. I felt that by holding the emotion from the session that I was offering a safe place for him to contemplate those dangers of being alive and the risk of death.

He did not go back to the old routine of taking a photo of me with his art work and then one of him and engineering for me to have the picture of him and him to take the picture of me.

He seemed much calmer than the last session. He did not mention his mother at all.

### **Seventh Session**

As we were clearing up after the session he noticed that the sand tray. The sun had been shining into the room and the sand had not been used by any other children for some while. He put his hand into the sand and said. 'Do you remember when I used to try and stop the water from running away?' I remembered the times he had struggled to stop the cracks appearing in the sandcastles that he made and trying to stop the water from slipping away. It was at the time when his whole world was beginning to crumble when his mother was very sick. He smiled at the memory of it. He took a small palm full of sand and gently kissed his hand and softly blew the dry sand across the tray. Then he said 'Mortal combat' I reflected you said 'Mortal combat'. 'Yes', he said. He continued 'With a soft kiss she blew the sand and every grain exploded into the world'. He smiled again. It was a very calm moment. I am aware that G had been very upset about his mother being cremated and I wondered if this recognition of the idea of 'dust to dust and ashes to ashes' was being played out. Also it feels to me like a very strong metaphor for the impact of the death of a soft gentle mother and the affect on his whole world.

Overall a calm session in which I was aware of a wounded child, both physically and mentally. A child who has been through a battle to keep his mother alive and lost it, a

child, who is aware of the huge impact of the loss of a nurturing mother. A quieter, less anxious but battle weary child.

At this point I will move towards the end of therapy.

### **Thirty-fourth session**

G arrived with 'Kes' the tumbler pigeon he had hand-reared. The box was tightly tied with string. He opened it and I was impressed with the gentleness and the care he showed towards her. He gently cooed in her ear when she felt panicky and she became calmer. The bird was real and in the room with us and he wanted me to hold her and get to know her. This was bird he was in control of. I thought of the story of the bird following him and his irritation about it.

I thought of the fact that his Aunt had told him that his Mum was always with him, following him and watching over him. Later she told me in the review session that G had wanted to use black magic to get his dead mother back and she had warned him that if he did then she would not be his real mother that returned but something evil that would look like his mother. I suspect that he had willed her back anyway and that is why he has been so frightened to sleep alone at night and imagines her lurking in the house and feels frightened. The story of the bird following him with the bird symbolising his mother has now moved on to G bringing his own tamed bird into the therapy room. This one he is in control of.

### **Thirty-fifth Session**



G engineers to bring two birds to this session. He

dupes his aunt into believing there is only one bird in the box but on arrival there are two when he opens the box in the play room. This is a fascinating session. The birds are mother and son. Son of 'Kes' is called 'Houdini'.

Houdini lives up to his name and escapes from G to fly in the room. Because Houdini flies then Kes flies after him. G tells me that his mother always flies after him. Like G's his own spirit mother following him, Houdini is followed wherever he goes. In this case the birds are contained and safe in the therapy room. The safety we have built up in our relationship is mirrored in the safety of the mother and son. Houdini is always flying off and finding places to hide. G's Aunt speaks of G running away from home when things get tough and becoming very upset and is often found in the cemetery talking to his mum. G speaks of Houdini as being 'a terror' he says it gleefully like a parent that's proud of a mischievous child. He also tells me that he hates Houdini's cry.

I think about the story of Kes and of the boy who tames the bird of prey and becomes respected and looked up to by his peers when previously he was not. I must read the book. I seem to remember the boy who tames Kes in the story is also a motherless child.

He tells me that Kes is loved by his grandfather and vice versa. When his grandfather comes into the tree she always flies to him. So he attaches a note to Kes's foot saying 'Hello Granddad'. He explains that next time he opens the tree he will be able to read the note. The grandfather is the maternal grandfather. I feel this a symbolic relationship between the bird and the man which suggests the father daughter bond, which was very strong in life.

G has found away of being in control of his fears he has projected them into the story of the bird which follows him and now made then concrete with the actual birds and the relationship he describes between the mother and son. I believe that he is now less controlled by his fear and more in control of his life. He has found his own way in the wise way that Roger's (1957) suggests. He offered me a way of meeting him, through his birds. I took it, as his therapist. We rarely spoke about the loss of his mother and yet we spoke of it constantly.

In this section of the results chapter, I have explored my experience of working with children both as a teacher and as a play therapist. The data provided has brought forth some interesting results. I am left with a deep wonderment and respect for the child. The child appears to be wise, even the very young child, in terms of knowing what he/she need to do in grief. Grief work for a child is couched in play because this is the natural language of the child.

James and Prout (1990) propose a new paradigm for the sociology of childhood. In this paradigm they assert that ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. They argue that it gives children a more direct voice and enables

them to participate in the production of data. I believe that giving the child a voice in research is the only way to know what it is to be a child. In this way I have collected data and through the experience and the obtained results, now feel more aware of the voice of the child in grief.

## Chapter 4

### Literature Review

*'The world does not contain any information. It is as it is. Information about it is created in the organism (a human being) through its interaction with the world. To speak about the storage of information is to fall into a semantic trap. Books or computers are parts of the world. They can yield information when they are looked upon. We move the problem of learning and cognition nicely into a blind spot of our intellectual vision if we confuse vehicles for potential information with information itself.'* (Illich, 1973, p.101)

I am aware that the literature itself does not contain solutions and did not want to get into a *'super-extended trawl'* (Dunleavy, 2003, p.29)

It was my aim in this chapter to review existing literature in the social sciences and medical literature concerning loss and bereavement. The classic texts that had been used for many years in the training of counsellors in bereavement issues were considered and critically evaluated using a chronological approach to track how theories had been created and developed over time.

In addition I was beginning to explore more recent research in journals specifically designed to deal with matters surrounding death, such as *Death Studies* and *Mortality*. These journals carried useful and interesting articles from social scientists from sociology, anthropology and counsellors working in the bereavement field. I found it

to be an arena in which counselling as a cultural activity was being considered and critically examined in relation to the experience of loss from sociological and anthropological perspectives.

Throughout the text I address the main research question when considering each source from the literature by underlining the aspect of each text that answers the question, *What do we do when experiencing loss?*

This review will focus, to some extent, on the controversy around the ideas on loss. There will be some nexus of debate between different theories on bereavement, in addition to other literature pertinent to the study. I will discuss positions, register my criticisms and affirm some loyalties. (Dunleavy, 2003)

I undertook a systematic documentation and bibliographic search and assigned a limited time frame to this. I am aware that my work will rest on the accumulation of both previous and the current literature on loss and bereavement. I bore in mind Dunleavy's (2003) suggested concept of 'value-added'. He further suggests that this concept will aid in keeping a critical eye on the changes made to the starting materials of the study. Has it been enhanced, transformed or differentiated? Any claims need to fit closely with that. In addition it means that one must retain, to quote, a

*'... .. strong relational pattern of argument in which you appropriately acknowledge the extent to which you draw on the existing literature.'* (Dunleavy, 2003, p.31)

The form of this review is a combination of a thematic approach and a narrative approach. The thematic review enabled me to consider books and papers with the theme of loss from different disciplines. In addition I wanted to consider a narrative perspective in terms of the literature on loss and bereavement, to gain a sense of development in the theories that prevail. There was some flexibility afforded to this study with a range of literature sources. (McLeod, 1994, p.21)

The timing of the literature review was made inconsideration of the methods used. The literature review follows the presentation of the heuristic and phenomenological results to honour the principle that the method deliberately avoids the imposition of pre-existing assumptions. (McLeod, 2001, p.74)

In each of the references I made to the literature I was looking particularly for how my research question could be answered in the text. What does each say about, 'What do people do when they are experiencing loss?'

Initially I turned to the literature on bereavement. It has a long history and the structure of presentation is in a narrative form, in the first instance, before moving onto current work and an evaluation across disciplines and ideas that are prevalent. The most recent research in the journals builds on the large volume of collected research studies by Stroebe et al (2001)

In chapter 31, '*Future Directions for Bereavement Research*', in *The Handbook of Bereavement Research* (Stroebe et al 2001), the authors' state that despite the scope and depth of the contributions to the handbook the overall coverage has been

selective. They also suggest that there remains much for future exploration. One of the suggestions is for more work on the commonalities versus the diversities between loss through death and other kinds of losses involved in very stressful life events and divorce, as examples. I note, in particular, that this relationship is beginning to emerge in work developing and known as *a psychology of loss* (Harvey & Miller, 1998).

Their final chapter of the handbook (Stroebe et al, 2001) identifies some of the core themes that are in the process of emerging from contemporary research in the field of bereavement and also they offer suggestions for future studies. I returned to this work and current journal articles once the backdrop from the historical bereavement literature was constructed.

The significant developments in bereavement research have been documented most recently by one of its pioneers, Colin Murray Parkes (2001) He divides the literature into three fields: studies of loss with the consequences; studies of attachments that precede losses; and studies of other psychological trauma. He further notes that the field of researchers is broad and embraces many disciplines and professions. This provides us with rich material and also a disparate quality to the knowledge gathered. The languages of each discipline serve to isolate the insights gained to each separate group.

Parkes (2001) traces interest in loss back to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. As early as this, writers were identifying loss as the cause of melancholia (Burton, 1621). Darwin made an attempt to understand grief in his book, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). He wrote about the *crying out aloud* noticed in many animal species,

when separated from those that they are attached to. If a human being tried to inhibit the cry it was noticed that the expression that resulted was produced by certain facial muscles. Darwin speculated that these muscles, the 'grief muscles' are less under control of the person than other facial muscles. As a consequence the grief expression was recognised as one over which we have little control. These early views on loss assert that when grieving, we are susceptible to deep sadness and we register the pain of separation in facial expression. So, these early views of grief assert that, what people do is to show distress, communicating the grief response to others, with little control over it and to become sad, sometimes deeply so. Today we may call this depression.

Later Freud (1917) produced his paper *Mourning and Melancholia*. This paper was the consequence of clinical observations in his work as a psychoanalyst. He was aware of the connection between loss, mourning and the deep sadness that can follow. It was Freud who introduced the concept of 'Grief work'. He believed grief to be a process that we have to work through in order to be healed. It was necessary to let go of protective defences and face the reality of the death. Freud believed that melancholia or depression, as it could now be called, could be the result of ambivalence in the relationship with the deceased or creating mechanisms of defensive avoidance. He believed that loss is a process, one in which the mourner must remove the libido from its attachment to a new one. In this example of theory, what people do is to become deeply sad if they do not face up to the reality of the loss or resolve the conflicting feelings of ambivalence by doing *grief work*. This work comprises of letting go of the old attachment and making a new one.



It was not until the 1940's that the next batch of publications on *trauma* (Kardiner, 1941) *acute grief* (Lindemann, 1944) and *morbid grief reactions* (Anderson, 1949) were published. These writers shared a medical model of grief and divided reactions into normal and deviations from the norm to be subsequently treated in a psychiatric context.

Kardiner's book (1941) challenged the psychoanalytic view that the effect of trauma was to bring up conflicts experienced in childhood. He asserted that when a person is traumatised by a major event then the ego becomes disorganised and the result can be a state of numbness, probably what would be currently known as *shock and resultant dissociation*, or *intrusive memories*, currently known as *flashbacks*. In this view of traumatic loss, what people do can be described as dissociating from the event and or experience debilitating flashbacks of the events leading up to the trauma. This is seen by Kardiner (1941) as pathological grief and requires psychiatric intervention.

Lindemann (1944) described *acute grief* and much of what he observed and described then is still taken to be the view of what is a normal grief and what is not. It is useful to bear in mind that he only used those seeking psychiatric help as his sample. He created a process map characterised by six stages, which last from two- five years.

### 1. *Somatic Distress*

- *Tightness of throat*
- *Choking*
- *Shortness of breath*
- *Sighing*

- *Empty feeling in the stomach*
  - *Loss of strength*
  - *Tension*
2. ***Pre-occupation with the Deceased***
    - *Hallucinations (actually seeing the deceased or sensing presence)*
    - *Sense of unreality*
  3. ***Guilt***
  4. ***Hostility***
  5. ***Changes in pattern of conduct***
    - *Restlessness*
    - *Aimlessness*
    - *Loss of concentration*
  6. ***Identification with the deceased***
    - *Assume traits of the deceased*
    - *Show signs of last illness of the deceased*

In his book '*A Grief Observed*', based on a diary kept for the first three weeks after the death of his wife, the author C.S. Lewis (1961) describes *acute grief* experience in this poignant extract:

*'No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.*

*At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says.*

*Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. I dread the moments when the house is empty.*

*If only they would talk to one another and not to me.*

*There are moments, most unexpectedly, when something inside me tries to assure me that I don't really mind so much, not so very much after all. Love is not the whole of a man's life. I was happy before I ever met H. I've plenty of what are called 'resources'. People get over these things. Come, I shan't do so badly. One is ashamed to listen to this voice but it seems for a little to be making out a good case. Then comes a sudden jab of red-hot memory and all this 'commonsense' vanishes like an ant in the mouth of a furnace.' (pp.5-6)*

This very personal account of grief contains some of the symptoms described by Lindemann (1944) as typical of *acute grief*.

Later, Marris (1958) interviewing widows after the death of their husbands, refuted Lindemann's (1944) claim. Marris found a much lower incidence of the *symptoms* than Lindemann had found. Interestingly, he found reports of hallucinations and the presence of the dead were just as common in those not seeking psychiatric help as those who did, thus doubting that these particular aspects of grief were in fact indicative of pathological grief and psychiatric illness.

The *grief work* identified by Lindemann (1944) involves three tasks.

1. *Emancipation from the bonds of the deceased*
2. *A re-adjustment to the environment from which the deceased is missing*
3. *The formation of new relationships*

He would say that what people do, in fact *need to do* when carrying out this work is to modify the emotional energy invested in the lost person and to address the self. The self-identity of the mourner has to be modified in order to live in the world without the deceased. When the first two stages have been accomplished, then energy can be invested in new relationships. He also believed that reluctance to carry out these tasks could be understood in terms of repression or avoidance of grief. The dire consequences of not carrying out the *grief work* was identified as *morbid grief reactions*, the term used by Anderson (1949), now termed as *chronic grief*. Anderson worked with those experiencing complicated grief reactions in a psychiatric unit in England. He believed that a long lasting and very intense reaction to grief was the most common problem he came across in psychiatry. He also believed that many other psychiatric disorders could be triggered by grief, for example, anxiety or manic depression (now known as Bi-polar disorder) This medical, pathological view of long lasting grief and its triggers for other mental illnesses was confirmed by Parkes, (1965) and is still believed to be prevalent today (Parkes, 2001)

Emotional work within the process has been accepted for some fifty years or more as both necessary and desirable for those in grief. It is and has been believed that the consequences of not working through the grief process, can lead to more serious mental health problems. However, within the literature explored so far, we begin to see the small crack that suggests that some of the symptoms of grief in the *acute stage* identified by Lindemann (1944) may not necessarily be in evidence or evidence of pathology, if they persist. The example shown of the *hallucinating widows* in the study carried out by Marris (1958) and his observations of lower incidence of

symptoms in this group indicate that a universal model cannot necessarily be constructed from one group of traumatised survivors, from a fire in a night club in Boston, USA, in 1944, seeking some medical support after the event.

For an empirical study of *normal grief* it is to the 1950's that we turn, and to the later published work of Bowlby and Parkes (1970). During the 1950's John Bowlby, a Psychiatrist, was asked by the World Health Organization (WHO) to write a report on children's mental health. It was 1951 and the Second World War was not long over. The affect on children across the world, in countries involved in the war of separation, through evacuation, death and becoming refugees was of concern and the report was to address the effect of separation and its consequences for mental health. In 1952, Robinson, who had been studying children who had been separated from their mothers when the children were in hospital collaborated with Bowlby on a paper (Robinson & Bowlby, 1952) This paper identified the changes in the psychological features of grief. Shock and screaming, followed by searching, followed by despair and finally detachment, were identified as the stages of grief in young children when separated from the mother. The first two stages were felt to be a *functional mechanism for retrievable loss*. The stages of despair and eventual detachment would only happen if the child was not reunited with the mother in a short space of time. The consequences of this were believed to be damaging to the child. *Separation anxiety* was identified as behaviour recognised in this context of loss. Consequently, when the report for WHO was completed Bowlby wrote a summary of the report (1953), followed by the trilogy *Attachment and Loss* (1969, 1973, & 1980) These publications, says (Stroebe, 2002) were highly influential in modifying policy and practice amongst professionals in the context of care for children.

According to Attachment Theory, what a child does when he/she experiences the loss of the mother is to try to become reunited by making a noise to alert the mother to the child and to search for the mother. If this fails to find her then the child will become despairing and in time, detached.

Losses in childhood, both short and long term have shown to have profound consequences (Parkes, 2001) Bowlby's (1953) report to the WHO on separation and homelessness '*revolutionised the field of child development research and led to the inception of attachment theory*' (Parkes, 2001, pp.36-37)

Attachment Theory has led to further research identifying attachment patterns for adults, based on childhood patterns and lead to a category of insecurely attached people who experience vulnerable childhoods and predicts the type and intensity of symptoms they may experience following bereavement in adult life. Parkes, (1991) has developed a questionnaire to study the attachment patterns of adults.

Parkes (1970) carried out a longitudinal study of widows in the first year of bereavement and noticed a similar pattern, in the psychological changes in the widows, to the one which Robertson & Bowlby (1952) had noticed in the separated children. So, he deduced, the mechanism for retrievable loss in infants becomes activated again in adult life when experiencing feelings of loss and consequent separation anxiety. In collaboration, Bowlby and Parkes (1970) published:

*a descriptive classification of the phases of grief, which comprised (a) numbness, (b) yearning and searching (c) disorganisation and despair, and (d) reorganisation. This classification has given rise to a great deal of controversy and spawned a number of alternative classifications. (Parkes, 2001, p.30)*

Parkes (2001) writes that he always imagined that this rough guide would be no more than this and it was always thought that people would move backwards and forwards through the stages, which were not intended to be a linear structure for unidirectional movement. More worryingly, the therapeutic community has taken the model and in some cases, used it to support the idea that the aim of therapy to help the client to move forward, if perceived to be 'stuck' somewhere in the process of grief. Parkes (2001) believes that this misuse of the model, that is, applying it rigidly has led to bereaved people feeling forced into a never-intended pattern and consequently made to feel very uncomfortable in therapy.

According to Parkes (2001) during these phases, what people do when experiencing bereavement is to feel numb, followed by a yearning feeling and the need to search, this then can result in despair and disorganised behaviour and finally some reorganising behaviour. This is not a linear process, but one in which there is movement in both directions and but a rough guide. Furthermore, contemporary work from Parkes (1991) develops this idea to show that when vulnerable children grow up they develop insecure patterns of attachment and when experiencing bereavement, throughout the life cycle, this can predict the intensity of the grief reaction and the symptoms they experience. Parkes (1991) predicts the following list of reactions to loss, based on his clinical experience of what happens when attachments come to an

end. This differentiated list enables consideration of both individual differences in what people do when experiencing loss and also connect to maternal/infant early relationship, social groupings, cultural child rearing practice and other environmental factors that affect behaviours.

**Anxious/ ambivalent children** (category II 1) children of mothers who are overanxious, insensitive to the infant and discourage exploration

- Lack trust in themselves
- Their relationships in adult life are often conflicted
- Prone to lasting grief when relationships end

**Avoidant children** (category II 2) children of mothers who cannot tolerate closeness and punish attachment behaviour

- Lack trust in others
- Tend to be compulsively independent
- Wary of closeness
- Have aggressive assertive relationships in adult life
- When relationships end do not cry and are unable to express grief

**Disorganised Children** (category II 3) children of mother's who have suffered major losses or other trauma

- Deeply unhappy
- As adults lack trust in themselves and others



- Fit Seligman's picture of 'learned helplessness' (1975) identified as a common pre-cursor of depression
- Easily become depressed
- Inclined to alcoholism when faced with loss

(Based on categories from Parkes, (1991) *Retrospective Attachment Questionnaire*)

In the 1960-70's a new genre of literature in the bereavement field emerged. This included Glaser & Strauss' work, *Awareness of Dying* (1965), and Gorer's, *Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain* (1965). From medical clinicians the contributions of Engel's thought provoking essay published in psychosomatic medicine, *Is Grief a Disease?* (1961) and Kubler-Ross's work *On Death and Dying* (1970) bring controversial aspects of loss to light. Glaser & Strauss both sociologists and Gorer, an anthropologist, added some new perspectives to the literature on loss. The previous studies, are described and criticised by Walter (1998) as a handful of psychoanalytical studies, in which, for example, the method of drawing conclusions from one kind of bereavement in just one part of the UK, Parkes (1970) is seen as far from adequate. He further asserts that these previous studies are greatly enriched by a differing perspective and other research methods. Whilst this is a fact, and I agree with sentiment of welcoming a broader research base in the field, I also believe this to be a harsh criticism of Parkes. When he wrote his seminal work *Bereavement; Studies of Grief in Adult Life*, (1972), he includes many references to Gorer's study in the text. Currently, Parkes (2001) continues to appeal to other disciplines to share insights. In addition the work by Bowlby on attachment (1953, 1969, 1973, and 1980)

the basis on which Parkes (1970) built his ideas, has a continuing influence in the bereavement field, some fifty years later (Stroebe, 2002)

The methods used by this later group include the first representative social survey of bereavement through an entire society (Gorer, 1965) and new paradigm research methods, such as, grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1965) van Gennep (1909, 1960) describes his writings on the concept of the *rite of passage*, now widely accepted as part of the popular vocabulary when speaking about transition and the losses involved, as:

*'....the result of an inner, illumination that suddenly dispelled a sort of darkness, in which I had been floundering for almost ten years'* (Van Gennep, 1909, 1960 (translated), Cited in Belmont, 1979, p.58. & cited in Hockey, 2002, p. 212)

This intense, deep exploration into the subject of transition resulted in a classic paper with far reaching influence and impact on further thinking about change.

Gorer's (1965) contribution to the knowledge base on loss and bereavement has had far reaching and significant effects. He was an anthropologist interested in the decline of ritual surrounding death in the nation and coined the phrase *death taboo*, describing it as a twentieth century taboo in which English people attribution of extolling the virtue of consideration for others, prevents them from expressing grief for fear of causing pain to others.

In Gorer's study, a representative sample of English people were given a questionnaire (359) followed up with 80 face -to -face interviews then conclusions drawn. Gorer (1965) believed that previous researchers tended to write as though the bereaved are alone in the world and had nothing else to focus on in life but the loss they were experiencing, as if they had no other occupation but to come to terms with the loss and work through the grief. Walter (1998) asserts that much the same could be said now. The value of Gorer's study, based on a robust method is that it attempts to root out the sociological and cultural implications of the experience of loss. It recognises that the experience is not exclusively or mainly private and a psychological one. In other words people do their loss experience in the process of living their everyday lives in relation to others. In this respect he is attempting to provide a Sociology of Bereavement. His overall thrust is that the mourning rituals of the beginning of the last century were in decline and all but vanished by mid-century and that coincided with a decline in religious observance and a desire not to express grief to others for fear of transgressing the cultural norm of consideration of others. This, he sees, as dysfunctional for society. From his study he deduced that people mourn intensely for six- twelve weeks and then he is flexible about the idea of when mourning is over. He saw the end of mourning not as *letting go of the loved one* but as becoming *emotionally restored* and able to *function fully in the society* to which you belong, again. During the time of intense grief, people should not be expected to take part in society as they had done before. *Time out* appears to be what happens anyway, during this early period of loss.

Walter (1998) is critical of the idea of ritual and rules in society dictating the mode of mourning. He argues that it may be functional for a society but not necessarily

functional for the grieving individual within that society, who may see these as restrictions akin to being in a dysfunctional straightjacket. Maybe, he suggests, this is why they have disappeared. The decline in ritual has brought about a freedom for people to mourn in their own chosen ways. So, what people do is mourn in their own idiosyncratic way, free from the rules and rituals dictated to them in society, as was the case in the past.

Water (1998) further suggests that Gorer's thesis assumes that ritual is functional and that lack of ritual in contemporary society is dysfunctional, even though the data does not show a clear relationship between ritual and *good grief*. Furthermore, Walter (1998) directs the reader to Durkheim's (1952) concepts of *anomie* and *egoism* as states arrived at in the development of industrial UK as these states arrived at around the time when the rules of mourning declined and social isolation prevailed. Both these states are created in modern industrial societies.

Gorer (1965) identified preoccupation with objects, i.e. retaining them as dysfunctional and referred to the hanging onto objects in bereavement as *mummification*. This is interpreted as denial of the reality of the loss. If the person is dead then they no longer need their possessions. So, not disposing of them within is seen as not accepting that the person will not return. Parkes, (1975) suggests that this is to preserve the assumptive world, which existed before the loss and this is felt alongside an unwanted and resented world which is waiting to replace it. This idea has remained in the popular consciousness as pathological behaviour and that after a period of reasonable time, for too early is also thought to be denying that the person ever was, belongings of the deceased should not be kept. Worden (1983, 1991) cites

Gorer's (1965) study and further adds that another form of denial, expressed as a distortion, is that the person sees the deceased embodied in one of their children. Gorer (1965) and Worden (1983, 1991) both agree that keeping objects belonging to the deceased, for example, keeping a bedroom just as it was when the person was alive is evidence of denial of the loss. Worden (1983, 1991) believes that acceptance of the loss is one of the tasks of mourning. If people do hang on to objects, both belonging to the deceased and/or that they associate with them, for too long, then it is considered to be pathological and not conducive to healing and moving on.

Looking to other literature on the relationship that humans have with objects outside the context of loss may be useful. The term pathology seems to be a most unhelpful one. It is such a common behaviour amongst those experiencing loss and my experience as a bereavement counsellor has shown me the functionality of what may appear to be dysfunctional to others.

At this point it may be helpful to consider Csikszentminaly & Halton (1981), who argue that social scientists have neglected a full investigation of the relationship between people and objects. In the preface of the book they state that:

*... 'the transactions between people and the things they create constitutes a central aspect of the human condition. Past memories, present experiences, and future dreams of each person are inextricably linked to the objects that comprise his or her environment.' (p.ix)*

Person- object transactions contribute to the model of self. They develop and argue for attention to this relationship around the framework of *Cartesian Dualism*. Rene Descartes (1640) spoke about the idea that *the self* is the subject of self-awareness and that the mind and body are separate entities. Therefore, we can know ourselves directly. We maintain a subjective and private self-consciousness. In this way thinking involves a transaction between the self and other. That is, subject and object. Therefore, when we ask ourselves, Who *am I*? We attend to certain bits of information that represent the 'I'. These signs become the object of interpretation. Because we can't attend to all our thoughts, memories and feelings that constitute 'I' we use representations. That is, we use things to stand for a vast range of experiences, which make up the self, that shape the self. The difference between self-awareness and self knowledge is that self-awareness is a process that is occurring in time and self knowledge, on the other hand is inferential. That is, it is mediated by signs, such as, language and thought. The result of this is that we are always open to correction, change and development and self-awareness is central to the process. In other words, Csikszentminaly & Halton (1981) are saying that people are selective in their attention.

William James (1890, 1950) states that:

..... *'millions of items in the outward order are present to my senses which never properly enter into my experience. Why? because they have no interest for me. My experience is what I agree to attend to. Only those items which I notice, shape my mind. Without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos. (p.402)*

This debate around things and the nature of things is further enlightened by the idea that we make order in ourselves, that is, we retrieve our identity by first of all creating and secondly interacting with the material world. How that transaction is carried out and the qualities of it will determine, to a large extent, the kind of person that grows and develops in the world. In this sense the things that surround us are inseparable from who we are. *The material objects are more than practically functional they actually constitute the framework of our experience.* This is what creates order and organizes our, otherwise amorphous selves. Therefore the material objects that constitute our lives are very important. (Csikszentmihalyi & Halton, (1981)

What is the relevance of this exploration above to the bereavement process? If a person is experiencing a sense of unreality and out of kilter with the rest of the world and in need of a new identity, that is, an identity that is to move forward in a world without the lost one, then this retrieval of identity will be necessarily managed by creating and interacting with the material world. The way any transaction is carried out and the quality of it will determine the kind of person that grows through and emerges from the acute grief experience. In terms of the theory illustrated by Csikszentmihalyi & Halton (1981) the things that surround us are inseparable from who we are. This view would question the idea of inappropriate management of the material world and see whatever we do, we do to give ourselves shape. Making order in ourselves necessitates managing the material world.

In the light of Gorer's (1965) theory on *mummification*, contemporaries, Glaser & Strauss (1965), questioned the relationship between the needs of the dying and their family and friends and the dominant medical ideology. They introduced a systematic

process of method, known as grounded theory. They believed that this would ensure both objectivity and social relevance to the focus of study, *awareness of the dying*. The idea of the study was to gain knowledge of what it was like to be in hospital dying. What was the quality of such an experience? They believed that they could offer practical guidance as external consultants, gathering data and using the results to build theory, which could influence policy and practice amongst medical staff in the care of the dying. Seale (1999) reviews their paper, a classic in the bereavement literature and evaluates it, within its temporal context.

*'Social craftsmanship is indeed Glaser and Strauss's avowed ambition and they extend this to an identification with sociologists as neutral technicians of social interaction'. (Seale, 1999. p.196)*

Seale (1999) puts forward the modern criticisms of this kind of research. He believes that his text inevitably portrays the moral status of the key actors, he cites selective reporting and choice of phrase as evidence of subjectivity in the method. A particular model of desirable dying is promoted throughout the text. The authors' own ideas alongside prevalent views and myths are reflected in the text. Nevertheless, there is says Seale (1999) moments of counter-intuitive insight and at times admirable analytic distance in evidence. He argues that today it would be:

*... .. 'unscholarly to advocate an uncritical return to the innocence of the Glaser and Straussian scientific paradigm'. (p. 197)*



Glaser and Strauss (1965), with all aspects considered offered a view that patients anticipating loss and their loved ones had needs that could be ascertained if the medical fraternity chose to heed them. The method of grounded theory exposed the power imbalance felt and attributed wisdom to those experiencing loss to know what their needs were. If consulted and listened too then the dying and their carers could articulate their experience and recognise what would be helpful. This element of knowing outside of a professional knowledge base was exposed though the use of grounded theory method. So the method, although flawed and inevitably imperfect raised the issue of autonomy and power in death and dying.

Within five years Kubler –Ross (1970) was publishing her book *On death and Dying*, declaring that patients dying in hospital were not having their psychological and spiritual needs met and to quote states:

*'He may cry out for rest, peace and dignity, but he will get infusions, transfusions, a heart machine, or a tracheotomy. He may want one person to stop for one single minute so that he can ask one single question-but he will get a dozen people around the clock, all busily preoccupied with his heart rate, pulse, electrocardiogram or pulmonary functions, his secretions or excretions, but not with him as a human being.'* (p.8)

This movement of returning to the individual and asking what it is to be human, rather than seeing people as unwitting pebbles tossed about on the beach of life is a theme of this period in the 1960-70's. This was further enhanced by exploration into eastern philosophies to find ways of dealing with matters of life and death.

Steven Levine (1986) who worked as a teacher at the seminars on death and dying in Chicago with Kubler-Ross furthers the debate beyond the *stages of dying* (Kubler-Ross) to demonstrate the concept of living with death, accepting death as part of life and therefore living fully in life as a perfect preparation for death. Levine, a Buddhist offers examples of meditations for the dying and writes of people dying in the same style as they live. He maintains that we live in a society that denies death and only when we acknowledge that everything changes and that life is fragile can we really begin to live. So grieving can be linked to the idea that we have denied the possibility of loss and when it happens we are not prepared for it. However, the experience can bring us growth in the self and ultimately freedom. Freedom to live everyday in the knowledge that it may be our last and therefore value it greatly. Levine (1986) describes grief thus:

*'I've been with many people whose grief has been beyond bearing. And in some ways it has been the best thing that ever happened to them. For they come to plumb the depths of their being. When we experience grief, we are not just experiencing the loss of our son or daughter, our husband or wife, our parent or loved one. We are dropped into the very pit of despair and longing. We are touching the reservoir of loss itself. We experience the long held fear and doubt and grief that has always been there. It is not an experience that most would choose, though the confrontation with this area of deep holding seems to be an initiation often encountered along the fierce journey toward freedom, spoken of in the biographies of many saints and sages. (p.85-86)*

So tragedy can hold the seeds of grace. The Tibetan Buddhist teaching, espoused by Levine (1986) invites people to embrace loss, to feel its pain, to honour the deep feelings of pain in all their intensity. In other words trust the pain, don't try to avoid it and it will take us to something essential in ourselves. When we do not fear loss then we can deeply experience the world. Indeed, Parkes (1971) paper on psycho-social transitions includes the adage that '*Crisis can lead to the stars as well as to the grave*'. (p.102) Intense pain can make it feel impossible that there can be a positive outcome to an apparently critical event speculates Parkes. In this paper, *Psycho-Social Transitions: A Field for Study*, Parkes sees grief as a process of realization in which the affectional bonds are severed and old models of the world and the self are given up. In addition to this 'healthy' model of grief Parkes (1971) also describes pathological forms of grief. These comprise *chronic grief*, when there is intense mourning including yearning and a depressive withdrawal with a failure to resolve the grief and *inhibited or delayed grief*. This is when the expression of grief is avoided or the need to grieve denied. Parkes believes that identification with the bereaved person occurs in pathological grief.

This pathologizing of grief is comfortable within a medical model of the experience. The term is not used in literature outside of this model and the link between grief, pathology and psychiatric conditions are located within a healthy/unhealthy construction of human grieving (Engel, 1961)

If all human experience is part of a social construction (Berger & Luckman, 1966) then grief, within this framework of disease has given rise to the idea that there is a right way to grieve and that the goal is healing. Parkes (1971) would add that more

than this, there is also new learning when there is a major life change and this involves passing through a psycho-social transition.

Transition is the focus of van Gennep's (1908, 1960 translation) work, *the rites of passage*. So, what does this classic text, from anthropology, add to the exploration of the literature on loss? What can an ethnographic study in France at the beginning of the twentieth century offer? van Gennep did not hold an academic position in any university. He described himself as a folklorist and linguist, operating outside the established academic circles (Hockey, 2002). In this work on the rites of passage, he explored the idea that life is about separation and being reunited. This is the case both for individuals and for groups. In the process of separation we, in a sense die and are reborn, we change form as we pass from one state of being to another. The process involves acting, ceasing to act by waiting and resting and then to begin acting again, but in a different way.

Van Gennep (1908, 1960) gathered his data using a *broad brush approach*. There was some descriptive material, but what he was most interested in were the linkages between different parts of a ritual and seeing those in relation to a much wider social context. He was very strongly connected to the idea of ethnography as a way of knowing. From all the data gathered and the consequent illumination, he devised a tripartite schematic structure for the idea of moving through a change in life.

1. The passage out of a previous phase (separation), including the social status that accompanies that stage.

2. An ambiguous time in which the individual is in a state of *betwixt and between* two fixed positions. Transitional and threshold rites are in play.
3. The phase of re-entry into a new time with a new social position

Furthermore, he believed that one of the parts would be dominant and the others not so important at anytime during the process of change, until the change is actually achieved. He wrote of death rituals and emphasised the phase of transition as the dominant phase. Hockey (2002) experiences this as counter-intuitive, imagining that the first phase of separation would appear to be important at a time of loss. The central, liminal phase is accentuated in funerals and the survivors of a loss become rooted in an extended process of transformation. The schema, designed by van Gennep (1909) which came to him as an illumination, after ten years of exploration, includes the liminal period, from the Latin *limen* meaning threshold, as a time of ambiguity. The mourners are located in this schema temporarily, whilst they transform.

It is my view that, when experiencing a loss, it is within this central phase of liminality that people find themselves struggling and feeling impatient and exhausted with grief, stuck and wanting to move on to the new phase, that brings the bereaved into counselling.

Much of the literature coming from the medical model of grief is based on the clinical experience of working with people referred to psychiatrists with what is known as *complicated mourning*.

Parkes & Markhus (1998) more recently have gathered together studies that look at losses, other than death and in all these studies they state that *it is clear that what is common is that it takes time for people to come to terms with the implications of change*, even if it is a positive change. Parkes (2001) observes that it takes time and support from others to begin to relearn our assumptions about the world. This suggests that, in order to move from the phase of transition, of liminality (Van Gennep, 1909, 1960 translated), we need to change structures of meaning that underpin our lives. This movement is gradual and involves the reflexive activity of re-interpreting the past, as opposed to giving it up.

The psychiatrist Worden (1983, 1991) wrote a handbook for mental health practitioners because he believed that many people, referred to psychiatrists, were not resolving their grief in a healthy manner. He found that many patients were coming to him *stuck* in grieving. In addition he found that many people seeking his help did not have conscious awareness that underlying the presenting problem was an unresolved grief. The book is premised on the fact that there are four main tasks of mourning. Worden constructs these stages using evidence of not making progress in mourning from psychiatric studies. The inference being that if it is possible to see how people get into difficulties in mourning, it might be possible to determine the tasks that need to be performed in order to prevent complication. This rests on the idea that if therapists and other health professionals know what constitutes a *healthy/normal* process then they can identify the issues and offer facilitation to an *unhealthy/complicated process*.

The four tasks of mourning are identified from pathological grief reactions. So, Worden (1983) has observed from his clinical practice what is not helpful and from this he determines, what he believes to be helpful. He uses empirical evidence to support his views, although not a practice-based researcher himself.

The first task: *Acceptance* is constructed from studies on denial (Dorpat, 1973), eccentric, reclusive or psychotic behaviour with denial as the focus (Gardiner & Pritchard, 1977), *mummification* as a mechanism of denial (Gorer, 1965) belief in reunion through spiritualism (Parkes, 1972) and irrational beliefs (Krupp et al, 1986)

The second task: *To work through the pain of grief* is constructed using the concepts of avoidance and suppression (Parkes, 1972), societal discomfort and pressure on mourners to move on (Pincus, 1974) stigmatisation of grief (Gorer, 1965), rarely, emphatic denial and vivid sense of continuing presence of the dead person (Parkes, 1972) and depression, as a result of avoidance (Bowlby, 1980)

The third task: *To adjust to an Environment in Which the Deceased is Missing* is constructed using the categories of lack of awareness and knowledge of all the roles played by the deceased (Parkes, 1972) a sense of loss of self, through loss of role and relationship (Zaiger, 1985), intense regression and helplessness (Horowitz et al., 1980), lowered self-esteem and personal inadequacy in attempts to fill roles of deceased (Goalder, 1985) learning new ways to deal with the world and gaining more positive self-esteem over time and feeling a loss of direction in life and over time finding a new one (Schukter & Zisook, 1986) and not recognising a change

in circumstances, promoting helplessness or/and withdrawing from the world

(Bowlby, 1980)

The fourth task: *To emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life* is constructed from the ideas that a mourner has to detach their memories and hopes from the dead by withdrawing emotional energy from the deceased and investing it in another relationship (Freud, 1913), when we can live without a need to reactivate the representation of the dead with an exaggerated tendency, whilst getting on with living (Volkan, 1985), finding a place for the dead, in the psychological life of the bereaved that enables making room for new relationships (Schuchter & Zisook, 1986, Marris, 1974). Worden has rewritten this section for the new edition of the book with an awareness of some criticism, for example, how can the above be applied to bereaved parents? With this in mind he attempts a catch all phrase to describe when the fourth task is incomplete. The phrase he uses is *not loving*. In other words, holding onto the past attachment without forming new ones indicates not moving on.

The literature base for his four task model is largely derived from the psychiatric and psychoanalytical literature with a smattering of sociology and anthropology.

Essentially it suggests a right way to mourn. For example, if the mourner is having difficulty in accepting the loss, he suggests that the counsellor/helper help the survivor to talk about the loss. This suggestion is not located in a cross-cultural context. At a research seminar on loss that I presented in a UK university, a visiting African student noticed that avoidance and denial of the loss accompanied by encouraging the mourner to accept the loss by talking would be seen as highly disrespectful in her tribe, where talking about the dead is taboo. So, in addition to



there being no evidence to support the four tasks based on how people accomplish uncomplicated grief, the tasks are also not sensitive to cultures outside of the prevailing medical/ psychiatric sub-culture in USA in 1980-90's.

The broader schematic process identified by van Gennep (1908, 1960 translation), not considered by Worden (1983, 1991), seems to be more useful as a universal model for the process of change. It is value free, not based on evidence, deemed as pathological by a sub-cultural group, and gives opportunity for observations about progress to be seen as both individual and socially located. Societal rituals and cultural practices can be seen to affect the individual in the process of change. In fact, change at a psychological level is seen as integrated with change in societal role, undertaken through interaction with others. Smail (1987) observes that evidence for the causes of the experience of distress of individual people in psychotherapy comes from a literature base which is found within a ludicrously short time-scale.

*'The 'literature' of research and 'laboratory experiment' by means of which most British and American psychologists orientate themselves tend to be compressed within-to put it on the generous side-the most recent twenty years. Satisfaction with this state of affairs depends upon a confidence in the relative infallibility of the 'scientific' methodology of 'objective' measurement and 'quantification' of human 'behaviour', and an indifference to the influence of historical, social and political factors, which seem to me to be increasingly hard to maintain. The necessary alternative is, to step outside the bounds of one's own discipline, and gladly to accept from whatever other sources offer themselves the kinds of conceptual help which contribute to making sense of one's experience.'* (Smail, 1987)

Smail and Worden are contemporaries, coming from widely differing perspectives on what it is to be human and how knowledge about the human condition can be gained. Smail (1997) believes that human misery does not originate within the person but is the result of the interaction of people with each other and from the nature of the world that we have created. In order to alleviate much of this, he believes we should change the way we behave towards each other and change some of the social institutions that we have created. He believes that 'the experts' cannot change the world but can only help the despairing and the depressed to adjust to it. In addition *patients* seeking help are just people driven far enough to do so and many others are probably equally unhappy and do not seek the help. He subscribes to the view that there is no evidence at all to suggest that the vast majority of people who consult, psychiatrists, psychologists and psychotherapists are ill. This is a widely differing view from Worden (1983) who argues that complicate grief can trigger psychiatric illness or be subsequently found to be at the root of it.

Other contemporaries, such as Stroebe & Schut, (2001), academic psychologists, largely accept Worden's (1983/1991) model but are critical in that they believe that not all those in grief undertake the four tasks and they also question the set order of them. They do agree that if the griever completes these tasks then adaptation will have taken place. They are also critical of the implicit time dimension of the model and argue that different coping tasks are appropriate at different durations of the process. They would want to add some additional tasks, such as, not only working towards an acceptance of the loss but also accepting a changed world. Also, they believe that, *time out* from grieving is as necessary as feeling pain. The subjective environment,

identity etc. needs to be constructed in addition to the external environment. They assert that new roles, identities and relationships are part of the new world of the bereaved and it is not just a matter of relocating the dead person and getting on with life.

Stroebe & Schut (2001) have gathered together all the various cognitive process models and asked the question What is adaptive coping? They come up with a model called the Dual Process Model (DPM) and claim that it is an attempt to integrate existing ideas, not a new model. The two stressors that bereaved people experience are *loss-oriented* and *restoration oriented*. This is a dynamic coping process, regulated by oscillation. This model espouses a complex regulatory process of confrontation (disclosure) and avoidance (denial). This model is at present an intrapersonal one. The designers of it state that an interpersonal framework could be superimposed on it. They could then explore gender differences and family dynamics, including marital conflict in the process of grief. This is an interesting model that respects the previous models and seeks to introduce a value-added dimension to them. The value base includes the idea that we cannot know whether an assumption is valid or not without a systematic analysis, or whether what people's beliefs about what is best for them, actually is. They believe that in order to help those who suffer in the extreme we have to learn about effective coping and that questionnaires for measuring coping have been developed from clinical observation and intuition. They are dismissive of inductive, empirical approaches and say that as scientists they strive to search for regularities in order to make predications. At the end of the chapter they aim to be all inclusive.

*'It is also evident that the range of outcomes that can be examined within the DPM framework is not limited to health-related ones but that variables as different as the creation of a biography about the deceased, following the social constructionist focus... ..can be introduced for examination.'* (Stoebe & Schut, 2001, p. 398)

Human suffering in the extreme deserves to be respected and just knowing the cause and how most people cope with it will not necessarily be useful to others. Other prevailing approaches, such as, constructing a biography of the deceased (Walter, 1996), a sociological perspective, may be helpful and there is much work on narrative and stories to be considered in processing experience. All of this current work in the psychological cognitive field seems to address just a part of what it is to grieve. My own experience of grief was certainly not about wanting to cope and more often wanting to escape from coping, more about wanting to fall into the experience and let myself be in grief, not coping at all. The ache for a place of asylum to break down in was pressing.

Contemporary literature in the UK on grief has comment to make on the process of counselling alongside comment on the process of loss and consequent grief. Walter, (1996), McLaren (1998), and Arnason (2000) include both aspects in their journal articles.

McLaren (1998), a counsellor, writes with fifteen years of bereavement experience in a thoughtful and insightful paper saying that when she gave presentations on her work to people working in the mental health professions that there would be vehement arguments insisting that her clients were displaying pathological grief. Her specialist

area of working with bereaved parents caused her to question herself and ask '*Could it be that all my clients were pathologically grieving?*' (1998, p. 281) With further experience and reading of personal experiences of grief in fiction, biography and the media, she began to realise that these extreme reactions were more the norm than the exception. She further questions the order of the four tasks of grief work, as designed by Worden (1983,1991) She has found that acceptance of the reality of the loss often comes, if ever, after her bereaved parent clients have moved on in respect of the other three tasks. She believes that her everyday experience of working with bereaved clients challenges the conventional wisdom about bereavement counselling. In his paper Walter (1996) is rather scathing of counselling for bereavement and suggests that bereavement counsellors see the process of grief as working through and resolving feelings with the purpose of detachment from the deceased as an accomplishment. McLaren (1998) counters this accusation by stating that how time is spent in the counselling session, in her experience as a non-directive counsellor is client – chosen and sometimes there are feelings which are addressed and sometimes cognitive issues.

Arnason (2000), an anthropologist, states that there has been considerable debate around Walter's (1996) paper and agrees with his view that counselling is about encouraging the client to address the affective domain, even when wrapped up in a non-directive model. This worries Arnason (2000) because he believes that counselling is potentially very directive and presupposes that emotions can be separated out from relationships and the means by which they are communicated. In addition he maintains that the power imbalance in the counselling relationship, in which the counsellor holds knowledge, inevitably disempowers the client. Knowledge

begets power (Foucault, 1997;1978; 1983). Furthermore, he argues that whilst counselling is a very difficult task requiring knowledge, skill and intuition it cannot escape its cultural and historical location. Humanistic, non-directive counselling contains a view of the human being and what constitutes motivation, i.e. the actualising principle. In addition there are political origins and consequences. He argues that the principles of counselling, that of, autonomy, self-reliance and self-respect are also seen as the foundation of the enterprise culture and new right values. Arnason (2000) cites Marquand (1992) in that he has argued that the relationship is one of mutuality. He believes the rhetoric of free choice and individuality is attractive to the values of the 1960's with its romantic revolution, during which humanistic counselling grew and developed.

To help the bereaved, Arnason (2000) is in favour of an approach which supports the notion of constructing a biography (Walter, 1996) and expanding it. He feels that four further steps are needed.

1. Recognise that the bereaved tell stories and to understand these as creative achievements of *emplotment*. (He clarifies that what is created is not a history but a story with the construction of plots and characterizations)
2. He calls for capturing how these stories speak of not only the deceased but also the *bereaved*. So, Instead of constructing a *biography of the deceased* (Walter, 1996), realise that there is a simultaneous construction of their relationship with the deceased.

3. Any biography of the deceased must draw upon how we believe lives should be lived
4. Stories of the bereaved are social in origin.

Overall, Arnason (2000) believes that bereavement work tends to advocate emotion work and that Walter (1996) has highlighted the largely neglected area of grief as biography. He further adds that grief as story would be more useful as a concept.

The theories of grief do not have much to say about story and what Walter (1996) and Arnason (2000) are saying is valuable. As a practising counsellor and play therapist the idea of constructing story within the counselling relationship is very familiar and the point that Arnason (2000) makes of presenting a way of understanding what bereaved people actually do, to which bereavement counselling has paid little attention, is probably better understood as not appearing in the theoretical literature, but does in the practice of counselling. He lumps the theory and practice of counselling together under the heading of bereavement counselling. I would suggest that this is an invisible process which could be made visible and therefore worthy of attention and incorporation into any study that is seeking to explore the question 'What do people do when experiencing loss?' I would suggest that experienced non-directive counsellors will, in practice, be enabling clients to construct stories of the bereaved, which reflect the emotions of the bereaved and their relationship with the deceased. More than this, the process will be reflexive, in that the relationship of the past will be changed in the process of counselling, as will the relationship due to the

loss. The relationship between the bereaved and the deceased will necessarily undergo change as counselling progresses.

McLaren (1998) does indeed implicitly describe the process of how the stories of the bereaved are constructed. These are indeed creative achievements of emplotment. On a practical note, the real problem for most bereaved parents is the conflict between their own emerging feelings and society's expectations of them (McLaren, 1998). This is often perceived of as unbearable. I imagine this is similar for other categories of bereaved people. Some coping behaviour is potentially self-harming e.g. smoking, alcohol, compulsive spending, prescription drugs, refusing to leave the home or seldom returning there. Other behaviours can be constructive e.g. keeping a journal, writing letters to the dead child, expressing themselves in poetry, painting or other expressive arts. Other bereaved parents raise money for charity or to do good works, in the name of the child. She believes the job of the counsellor is to hear about the strategies, neither to condone nor condemn them. They are all part of the story of bereavement, which is a reflexive process occurring to construct the new relationship with the deceased. Walter (1996) describes the value of constructing *accurate* biographies of the dead. McLaren (1998) believes that many of her bereaved clients try to construct biographies not with the aim of accuracy but in order to gain a *whole* picture. She describes them as, *devouring accounts of the impact* (that their children) *made upon others*. In this respect the stories of bereavement are being constructed within a social context. Walter (1996) believes that the bereaved need to speak to others who knew the deceased, whereas McLaren (1998) feels that, in addition, she can provide an audience for the bereaved parents to tell her the life story of their



child, in all the complexity that involves and that being able to speak personally with all that knew the person is not always possible, for example, a stillborn child.

*'Many parents delight in bringing photographs, audio and video cassettes, letters, cards, prose, poetry and pictures their children have produced or which are associated with them. (McLaren, 1998, p.288)*

McLaren (1998) suggests that the photographs and other memorabilia give chances for remembering the lives of the children, facilitation for conversation and reminiscence, and to enable introducing the lost child to those who never knew them. This is further supported by Riches & Dawson (1998). However, in the case of video records of the child's life, ambivalence is noticeable as the contrast between a moving image of the child on a screen, so much alive and the emptiness of the room, when the film stops, is so great that sometimes such activity is avoided.

Overall, McLaren (1998) aims to offer an alternative perspective of the role of the bereavement counsellor, to the negative one suggested by Walter (1996). She has not tried to offer a new model of grief but offered her professional clinical experience to illustrate diversity and to question the criteria for pathological grief. She believes that Worden's (1983, 1991) schema offers a therapist's agenda and she works from the client's agenda. In addition she respectfully suggests that there are limitations to the model. Her experience with the elderly has been a rejection to the concept of letting go of lifelong attachments, which she sees as reasonable. She calls for an observance of the diversity of client groups and variety of deaths and the consequent effect of grief and its outcome. She concludes that the purpose and process of grief extends to

all losses, traumatic and natural death, and supports the view, suggested by Klass et al (1996) that a new understanding of grief to encompass a broader perspective, be applied to losses in other areas of human existence, including adoption, infertility, divorce, relationship break-up and any other kind of unwanted loss.

McLaren (1998) illustrates that there is much more to the grief process than catharsis and that the grief experience is occurring in the process of living normal everyday life and counselling offers but a small window into the experience of it. To this end I look to the world of the artist to try to bring back some of the richness of the process, a reverence for suffering and to introduce the idea of grief counselling as witnessing a series of moments, more like a poem rather than hearing a story.

Berger (1984) describes all stories as battles which have to end in either victory or in defeat. There is a moving to an end, and an outcome will be known. Perhaps mourning the loss of someone in life is less like a story and more like a poem.

Counselling the grieving, like a poem, regardless of whatever outcome, crosses the battlefields, tends the wounded, *'listening to the wild monologues of the triumphant or the fearful'* (Berger, 1984, p.21) the process of grief counselling, like a poem, may bring a kind of peace to the sufferer. But, *'not by anaesthesia or easy assurance, but by recognition and the promise that what has been experienced cannot disappear as if it had never been.'* (Berger, 1984, p.21) It is not a matter of coping or not coping or feeling pain or taking time out, it is being raw and knowing that the experience of grief, the all encompassing submergence in it *'has acknowledged'* (Berger, 1984, p.21), in the way that language has acknowledged in a poem, *'has given shelter to an experience which demanded, which cried out.'* (Berger, 1984, p.21)

The unrelenting courage of Berger's heart tearing observation about poetry plus heeding Smail's (1987) call to look outside the bound's of one's own discipline cleanses me of the idea of reducing grief to coping until a satisfactory ending happens. Grief work encompasses much more than managing grief. It is also about being in it and going where it takes us. Sometimes, into realms others would call *insanity*. Sometimes into realms that some would describe as *not coping*. I would like to stay in the murky area of loss for a while and shed this pseudo-scientific cape of psychological approaches. Kundera (1991) writes of poetry as, to quote:

*'The purpose of poetry is not to dazzle us with astonishing thought, but to make one moment of existence unforgettable and worthy of unbearable nostalgia.'* (p.28)

If grief is more akin to poetry than story, then the idea that grief can give us *unforgettable existence worthy of unbearable nostalgia* (Kundera, 1991, p.28) would be so, and for me, that would offer a more reverential attitude to loss and the mourner. Suggesting that being able to cope and listening to experts on grief, as necessary, due to the ignorance most of us have about what is best for the self in mourning (Stroebe & Schut, 2001) as a way of offering help to the bereaved, feels to me, to reduce the experience of loss to an expert subject. A subject, which some can know more about than others, because the *knowers* are academics or therapists. Laing's (1970) view that people should be allowed to *break down* and that *not breaking down* is not necessarily an indicator of health, in the circumstances, offers a more radical view, and for me closer to my own experience of grief and closer to the experiences of McLaren's (1998) clients' experience.

A narrative review of literature has shown that the theories of bereavement have originated in medical and psychoanalytical settings. There have been interesting discoveries about the place of transition in human experience from the anthropological and sociological literature. Current counselling practice is largely resting on theories that are felt to be largely inadequate to account for what experienced counsellors with many years experience have come to know about the experience of loss. In addition there are contemporary social scientists that question the cultural practice of counselling and offer alternative ways of addressing loss experience. Towards the end of my search I found myself drawn to views outside the social science literature and will continue this discussion in the next chapter. This review gave me a good base upon which to evaluate the findings of my own empirical study. I proceeded to locate my findings within the literature, illustrating where I can offer something new to the debate.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion of Results

This chapter considers the results from study in relation to prevailing literature, in order to develop a deep comparison of the findings with previous research and analysis of these themes. My research question, *what do people do when experiencing a loss?* will be present and considered throughout the discussion. In addition the secondary question will be considered, *does what people do when experiencing loss bring about a healing?*

As I have been a bereavement counsellor and an academic, teaching counselling in higher education for some years, I did have some knowledge of the current literature in the field of bereavement and loss. However, the method of qualitative research chosen seeks to deliberately avoid the imposition of pre-existing assumptions. (McLeod, 2001, p.74) This was not wholly possible. The gathering of data before the review was a positive and useful experience. Nevertheless, because I have now broadened and deepened my understanding of the literature, questioned its basis for claim to truth, rediscovered old research papers and books and discovered new ones, both from within the predictable fields and from without, my knowledge base has expanded and developed. In addition the findings have led me to explore other literature.

The heuristic study, initially, resulted in four depictions (one presented as a self-dialogue and the three others constructed as self-narrated depictions, followed by a

portrait and a creative synthesis, which is still emerging and changing as I come to write this chapter. The process of exploration and desire to handle the data in a different way, led on to an empirical phenomenological study in which the essence of the experience of loss was described.

As the time goes by and I am paying less attention to, the creative synthesis part of the study and yet, I notice I am still in the process of it.

*'It is in our idleness, in our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to the top.'* (Virginia Woolf, 1983)

As the writing unfolds in this the penultimate chapter I remain open to changes in the final creative synthesis from the heuristic study. The final version will be in place soon, as a cut off time will need to be reached, in order to finish the work.

In consideration of the final chapter of Stroebe et al (2001) in which the editors identify some of the core themes that are in the process of emerging from contemporary research in the field of bereavement and make suggestions for future studies, I ask, *am I offering something in this study that has already been identified by those researching in the field of bereavement, as useful and wanted?* Firstly the authors state that there is a general consensus that analysis at a theoretical level is relevant. Developmentally, the need now appears to find out what theories are useful and how should this guide future research. (Stroebe et al, 2001, p.742). Although the contributors to the book offer differing views as to the type and scope of theoretical frameworks (integrative and understanding bereavement within broader theory, for

example, emotion theory, attachment theory or cognitive stress theory), the editors state that we need an integrative theory of bereavement as a future goal. They believe that it would be useful to advocate a multiplicity of approaches, cross fertilisation between theoretical positions and theoretical analysis at a general and at grief-specific levels. Parkes (2001) divides the literature into three fields: studies of loss with the consequences; studies of attachments that precede losses; and studies of other psychological trauma. My study and consequent results address each of these areas. He further notes that the field of researchers' is a broad one and embraces many disciplines and professions.

The field of bereavement research holds richness and diversity due to the broad interest in it. I have attempted to embrace all contributions with equal respect and interest and believe that working together to produce an integrative theory would indeed be a wonderful achievement. At present, I agree with Parkes (2001) in noting that the languages of each discipline serve to isolate the insights gained and keep them apart in each separate group, although there is now a research discourse between therapeutic practitioners and social scientists, for example, Walter (1996), McLaren, (1998), & Anarson, (2000). The experience of bereavement counselling practitioners is coming forth in the literature and speaking out strongly to challenge critics of therapy and counselling as a cultural practice in respect of helping those who request it through loss experience.

The results of this study suggest that counselling after a major loss experience has been helpful. For instance;

*'...I've done so much work with my counsellor in terms of looking at the ways that I perceive the world, the way I am in the world, the way my being is...that I feel stronger to do that now.'* (Depiction 1)

In this quote the participant speaks of the experience of loss, leading to counselling and the counselling experience leading to an existential task which he sees as helpful in strengthening him for the future. He recognises that the experience of loss has caused him to question many other aspects of himself. McLaren, (1998) believes that there is much more to the bereavement process than just catharsis and for many the process of being in counselling can offer'

*'...an oasis in a barren land, a place where they can shed the pretence of 'coping' and be more truly themselves, whatever that may be.'* (p.289)

So, counselling the bereaved is about much more than catharsis and coping. It can lead to learning and self-development through the loss experience.

In seeking an answer to the main research question; *what do people do when they experience a loss?* This study highlights the following key findings.

### **Key Findings**

The key findings from the study include the concept of a *grieving self*, the role of physical objects in grief work, the state of liminality, the role of spirituality and the idea of a post-modern grief. These findings are intriguing and cause me to consider, to reflect, to want to know more and to identify ways to continue to explore. A new



model of what it is to do grief work is suggested. I begin with an in depth critical discussion of the concept of a grieving self and current studies

### A Grieving Self

The results of this study indicate that it is possible that each of us has a functional ***grieving self***, which is **permanent, contains a cumulative store of pain and is ready when needed. It is located in a timeless dimension of the constantly changing, fluid self**, a self that is **not just intrapersonal but also located in the interpersonal, physical, spiritual and cultural domain**. I suggest that the grieving self could be seen as a subpersonality of a pluralistic self (Rowan, 1999)

In addition the results of the study indicate a post modern view of the grieving self

**‘ ...by being in the world and interacting in the world we work at grief. We work at grief when watching TV, reading a novel, involved in a love affair, friendship, putting a photograph in a frame or a wallet, listening to music, talking, having sex, walking, being silent, accepting a caress, visiting a place.... The list is endless. All human activity provides opportunity and location for grief work. Therefore, the definition of grief work could be much broader than it is. Or for that matter different than it is. If the self can be said to be dialogical then grief work can be seen to be a process that is informed by dialogically structured polyvocal activity. (Shotter, 1999)**

Traditional psychotherapy sees our history of loss as dependant on childhood trauma and loss and becomes layered as time goes by. (Grof, 1975) described a COEX

system as a system of condensed experience. The results of this study support this view.

**‘We see loss both as compounded loss over the years and yet each loss as separate and different from the others. Sometimes there are overlaps in the commonality of experiences we have of loss.’**

### **The Grieving Self – Could it be a subpersonality ?**

In consideration of the possibility of the grieving self being a subpersonality, I turn to Rowan (1999) who describes subpersonalities as,

*‘Semi-permanent and semi-autonomous regions of the personality capable of acting as a person’. (p.11)*

He also describes some of these personalities as unique to the individual and some which seem to be universal and normal. The qualities of these subpersonalities are such that in addition to being quite normal they can become a problem to the individual, most likely, says Rowan (1999) when they are denied. He asserts that repression, splitting and denial causes problems. These subpersonalities may be taken at times to be solid characters but they can in fact split into two or merge into one, appear and disappear.

The therapeutic theories suggest that splitting in the personality seems to originate in early experiences in the family and Rowan’s statement is supported. Jung explored the concept of the personal unconscious and used the technique of ‘active

imagination' to tease out different aspects of the self. Perls (1969) included a split within a person and devised the 'empty chair technique' for patients to work through there difficulties as a voice dialogue made explicit.

More recently Bolger (1999) and Greenburg & Bolger (2001) assert that the self can become 'shattered' when a person allows the intensity of emotional pain to the point of 'brokenness'. The critical tasks of feeling helpless and hopeless are seen to be adaptive responses in letting go of what has already gone in a loss experience and that promotes a transformation in the view of the self, the world and the other. This two stage process includes allowing 'brokenness' and then 'staying with brokenness'.

The first stage includes accepting loss of control, overcoming the fear of annihilation, allowing fear and shame to coexist with the 'brokenness', letting go of 'covers', tolerating the tension of brokenness and allowing the self to question what has been accepted about the self until now. The final task acts as a bridge over which 'staying with brokenness is secured'. In this second stage the person must acknowledge 'brokenness' and allow the associated feelings to be expressed. These can include anger, sadness for the self and compassion for the suffering of the self.

Acknowledgement of specific issues leads to a transformation of the self. This newly emerging self, which can be seen either as a grieving subpersonality or as a voice from the polyvocal self, then begins in Bolger's (1999) terms to take responsibility and to see its own adaptive needs as good. Alongside this there is a letting go of coping behaviour and a demonstrated increased capacity to experience feelings and make changes in the way the person relates to others. Others become more accepted

and more realistically viewed. The findings from this study would support the idea of a shattering of an old life through the experience of loss and the term brokenness is an evocative one. It certainly resonates with my own experience in that it was only when I allowed myself to break and to stay with the brokenness was I able to enter into a new life and leave my painful losses behind. This is very much an intrapersonal model of what it is to experience painful emotions. I turn now to other work of an intrapersonal nature.

Johnson (1986) spoke of 'inner work' and worked with people's dreams and active imagination to encourage personal growth. The object relations school describes the idea that people can take in experience and retain it as an internal object, which could be expressed as a subpersonality, argues Rowan (1999) In addition Clarkson (1992) describes Transactional Analysis in terms of expressions of self through either a parent, adult or child sub-self.

Accepting that the concept of subpersonality is established, Rowan (1999) lists some of the 25 or synonyms that he has identified to describe the idea, including ego states, sub selves, sub identities, identity states, alter-personalities and deeper potentials. The question to ask of the results of this study and the emergence of a grieving self is;

From this study, does the concept of a *grieving self* meet the criteria for inclusion as a subpersonality?

The concept of a grieving self does appear to sit comfortably within the concept of subpersonality as described above. The grieving self could appear to be semi-

permanent, if it resides within the personal unconscious and only comes into play when activated. This could give the appearance of semi-permanence. My interpretation of the findings indicate that it is, by nature permanent, that is, life long and would possibly be categorised by Rowan as a *universal* subpersonality (1999, p.11) Universality would be so because each person experiences loss as a normal part of experience in life and therefore each person would have a grieving self. The semi-permanent nature of it could be seen as an ever-changing universal subpersonality affected by all life's losses.

The grieving self also appears to be autonomous and can appear to be capable of acting as a person. This quality would be seen when the grieving self is called into action to deal with a threatened or actual loss and to experience emotional pain at times of loss according to Bolger (1999) and Greenburg & Bolger (2001)

### **When does the grieving self first appear?**

Lake (1980) argues that if trauma occurs in infancy then the child will split rather than repress the experience. This occurs in the third level of trauma which involves opposition to pain which is very strong and cannot be coped with by the infant after birth or earlier. Rowan (1999) refers to Firman and Gila (1997),

*'It may seem to me, they say, that I am faced with the loss of myself, and this means ceasing to exist altogether. In desperation, I split into two. I turn my back on my original OK self, and put into its place a self which has lost the notion of being perfect and whole. So now there is an OK-me (distanced and disowned) and a not-OK-me (fostered and put forward as the answer to the insult). This is the basic split;*

*and of course, splitting is a much more drastic defence than repression. (Guntrip, 1961, 1977; Grotstein, 1981)' (Rowan, 1999, p.16)*

This quote above in which a theory of splitting due to early trauma is analysed suggests that the subpersonality created in the split is pathological, in that it is an introject and consequently denied to awareness (Rogers, 1951)

*'Rogers' (1951, 1959) theory of the divided personality' provides a means of understanding self-plurality while maintaining the integrity of the experiencing whole' (Cooper, 1999 p.57)*

This makes sense if the infant or foetus is traumatised. Could it be that early loss experience is experienced as a trauma too? It could easily be argued that separation from a main caregiver could be seen as traumatic for an infant. What if this same kind of splitting reaction occurs to create a grieving self which is functional and a socio-evolutionary mechanism for dealing with threatened loss as a normal part of survival in life?

Bowlby's (1953, 1969, 1973, and 1980) attachment theory indicates that separation anxiety is universal and functional in terms of human evolution and a mechanism the survival and protection of the young. A child separated from the main care giver becomes acutely distressed and it would make sense then, that each of us could begin to develop a grieving self when the first split occurs during the first separation anxiety experience. This would also be in accord with the idea that splitting occurs within the personality in early experiences within the family (Grof, 1992)

This perspective would show the newly created grieving self to be functional, adaptive and non-pathological as separation anxiety is an indicator of healthy normal attachment which is functional for survival (Robinson & Bowlby, 1952) This idea of a functional adaptive response to letting go of control is echoed in the later work around emotional pain in adult life of Bolger (1999) and Greenburg and Bolger (2001)

Some have argued that a child can be traumatised before birth or at birth. In this case the child would be born with a grieving self, the subpersonality having been created before separation anxiety could occur. If early experience of trauma is the stimulus for splitting to occur as a violent defence response (Lake, 1980, Laing, 1982 & Grof, 1992), then separation trauma before or at birth (Janov & Holden, 1977) could create a grieving self already containing potent and painful material whilst the infant is in the uterus, for example, the death of a twin before birth or in early infancy.

Winnicott (1975) would argue that splitting occurs in the very young as a defence against the *annihilation* of the experiencing subject. Rowan (1999) comments on the extreme nature of the word, annihilation, used by Winnicott and further remarks that it is a word that is encountered frequently in this literature and brings us to realise that this is a matter of life and death to the child, as is also evident in separation anxiety behaviours described in attachment theory (Robinson & Bowlby, 1952) A child threatened with annihilation is undoubtedly going through a threatened loss experience of the most intense, traumatic and extreme kind. The later work of Bolger (1999) describes overcoming the fear of annihilation when experiencing emotional pain in adult life as a necessary part of the process of becoming transformed by

accepting 'brokenness' and staying with it. It seems that when we experience the fear of annihilation when young then later losses in life could rekindle this early fear and it is a fear we may need to overcome in order to heal past hurts and pain in later life.

In consideration of the existing theories in the literature it can be suggested that the creation of a subpersonality, called the grieving self, could be traced back to existence before birth or at birth for some people and for others in the early experiences of separation anxiety as part of attachment behaviour.

There is further support for the idea of a non-pathological functional multiple self.

Heinze (1999) argues that at conception,

*'Each egg and each semen carries, with the physiological, also emotional/psychological, mental and spiritual memories of past generations' (p.165)*

This transpersonal view of the human being is further asserted when Heinz writes of us being more accepting of our own and others multiplicity.

*'In other words, a consciously lived multiplicity is not pathological at all but enriches our understanding of life and its purpose' (Heinz, 1999, p.165)*

This non-pathological view of a multiple self could support the concept of a non-pathological grieving self. Heinz (1999) brings in evidence from Ornstein (1986) that the brain has developed over 500 million years and is not a single structure but a multileveled structure in which the layers seem to be laid on top of each other. She



further adds that many of these separate brains 'loosely speaking', have minds of their own.

### **How does the grieving self grow and develop?**

Results from this study of early loss experience, would support the concept of an *early* developing grieving self, a subpersonality, which appears at some point in infancy or early childhood and develops through the life of each individual. It also appears to be a repository for cumulative loss experience and associated pain and becomes activated when new or threatened losses appear. Rowan (1999) observes and supports this aspect of the results of this study when he notes that, in a subpersonality once the split has become established,

*'... ..it has effects which continue long afterwards'* (p.21)

He extends this idea when he quotes the psychoanalyst Leo Rangell (1973) to support his claim,

*'Reflecting on the subject of psychic trauma, I suggest that the trauma an analyst is pitted against is often no longer the trauma of childhood but the cumulative traumata of a lifetime of psychic repetition of the original in an attempt to master it....If the trauma is repeated indefinitely and mastery fails to evolve, it is like a series of reinoculations which come to exceed the original dose and restore the original disease in chronic and more virulent forms.'* (Rowan, 1999, p.21)

This insight from therapeutic practice would suggest that people who have experienced severe early childhood trauma and associated losses can develop a grieving self which becomes a potent location for concentrated loss experience. The results of this study indicate that people with early childhood trauma and associated losses do appear to carry such experience for many years and the early material appears to be present in current experience. The participants in this study, when asked about their experience of loss all included childhood loss experiences, which indicates the potency and importance of these early experiences.

There is further support for the idea of a pattern of trauma developing early and being repeated either obviously or in some disguised way. Alice Miller (1987) researched early trauma and believed that the way an infant deals with the first split will set the pattern for future traumas.

*'... many of the drastic things which happen in the lives of adults may result from repetitions of the original trauma in some direct or disguised form.'* (Rowan, 1999, p.21)

In this study the results indicate that early trauma may have been repeated through relationships and be present in dreams for some in adult life.

If there is a subpersonality called the grieving self, it does seem possible that it contains a cumulative store of pain and continues to grow and develop throughout the life cycle. All loss experience is contained there and all new losses seem to be mourned in relation to preceding losses. It therefore makes sense that new loss will

become located there too. The participants of this study speak of many losses throughout the life cycle and relate them to each other in the interviews and the self-dialogue. In this way the grieving self, as a subpersonality is ready when needed to collect and hold new loss. The results of the work of Bolger (1999) support the idea that painful emotional experience sets off a process that is either adaptive or halted if 'covered' by denial of feelings or the rejection of new awareness. This then results in no healing or repair. The grieving self may therefore be adaptive and ready to respond to losses as they happen with the potential to promote healing. The results of this study have shown a broad level of activity that leads to healing. Bolger (1999) concentrates on the process and outcomes of therapy. In this study one of the strong findings is that people are resourceful and come to work at feelings associated with grief in many creative ways.

**Where could the grieving self be located and how would it be structured?**

The results of this study indicate that the grieving self is *located in a timeless dimension of the constantly changing, fluid self*.

Rowan (1993) believes that subpersonalities are contained in our personal unconscious. This is formed through our experiences and the subpersonalities that we develop are created through individual biographical experience. A grieving self, would, in Rowan's (1993) terms, be located in the personal unconscious. This seems to be a reasonable assumption as the results of this study would indicate that the grieving self is not always present but is capable of acting as a person when required.

It would appear then that the grieving self meets the criteria to be included as a subpersonality. Can the literature throw any more light on it as a structure?

Rowan has studied the work of Grof (1975) and demonstrates that a subpersonality could be constructed of layers of memories.

*'If we personify a COEX system, it comes to life as a subpersonality'* (Rowan, 1999 p.23)

Grof (1975) described a COEX system as a system of condensed experience. In this way, memories have a theme or contain similar elements and in addition are characterised with a strong emotional charge. He describes each system as having layers and the deepest layers contain vivid and colourful memories from early childhood. The layers on top are described as more superficial and contain memories from later times in life up to the present. Each COEX system has its own theme and this theme permeates all the layers and represents them as a common denominator. These systems would be located in the personal unconscious.

The grieving self could be seen as a COEX system, a system to deal with loss. In this structure the deepest layers would contain vivid and colourful memories of the earliest losses in infancy and early childhood and the layers on top characterised as more superficial and containing memories of other losses in life. However, the results of this study indicate that some of these losses later in life are very traumatic and painful and not regarded as superficial at all. But, bearing in mind the concept of annihilation when losses are before, at birth or in early infancy then it could be imagined that

however distressing later loss these losses may not carry fear of annihilation, unless the rekindling of previous early loss is evoked with later losses.

In addition to internal views of the psyche there are researchers who challenge us to debunk this idea and consider a relational understanding of self. I turn now to consider the findings from this study in the light of relational understanding.

### **The grieving self: a dialogical self experiencing a post-modern grief?**

*'By being in the world and interacting in the world we work at grief. We work at grief when watching TV, reading a novel, involved in a love affair, friendship, putting a photograph in a frame or a wallet, listening to music, talking, having sex, walking, being silent, accepting a caress, visiting a place.... The list is endless. All human activity provides opportunity and location for grief work' (from the results of this study)*

The results of this study indicate that the grieving self is dynamically interactive. It challenges ideas about grief being an inside activity, largely in the mind of an individual. The sociological literature offers new definitions of the self that would appear to accommodate the findings.

John Shotter (1999) questions ideas about,

*'...Cartesian conceptions, centred in mental states and acts 'in the mind' hidden inside people's individual heads, that have dominated our thought for so long in the West. (p.71)*

Katz & Shotter, 1996a, 1996b and Shotter, 1996 speak of social poetics. In other words behaviour is informed by dialogically structured, polyvocal understanding. (Shotter, 1999)

*'Thus a person's psyche (if such an entity can be said to exist at all) is according to surrounding social conditions, an entity with constantly contested and shifting boundaries; something we can re-collect in one way one day, and in another the next. And even when 'thinking' all alone, these considerations of our relations to others are still the ones to which we must address ourselves- that is, if we want what we do or say to be acceptable to, and to have point for, others. ' (Shotter, 1999, p.89-90)*

In this way *relational understandings* are lived out in life.

*'Instead of living our lives from within theories, systems, narratives, or dreams, they bring us back to living our lives within life itself. ' (Shotter, 1999, p.90)*

This multi-voiced dialogical world that Shotter (1999) speaks of is an interactive one, one that sees mental activity as primarily 'out there' in the world between us and others.

This view of the self fits very well with the idea of a *constantly changing fluid self, located in interaction*. In this view we create ourselves in interaction rather than have a self with inner thoughts that then become expressed in words.

The findings of this study suggest that we do our grief in interaction between self and others in relationship, self and places and self and objects. These findings could comfortably sit within Shotter's (1999) view of the person, as the grieving self appears to be located in the living of the person's life. In this way the processes that define the content of the psyche do not happen inside but outside with the person's participation. (Voloshinov, 1986) We do not have a self but we do our self in the process of living our life. Therefore, in this perspective, we do not have a grieving self as a sub-self but as a *voice* that participates.

*'Like the unbridgeable split between body and mind, we introduce a split between the world of what is objectively given and the world in which we are actually living our lives, between the world of the old and repeatable and the world of what is yet-to-be-achieved, the world of new and 'first time' events.'* (Shotter, 1999, p.75)

In this view the grieving self can be viewed not as a sub-self or subpersonality of a private, inner, orderly, logical and systematic psyche but a dialogical transaction between people out in the world. The findings of this study suggest agreement with this concept of a dialogical self, in that the grieving self and its activity are ***not just intrapersonal but also located in the interpersonal, cultural and physical domain***. It can be said that,

*'...an individual's consciousness works not so much in terms of thoughts as in voices, in terms of multiplicity or polyphony of voices-each with their own unique position in existence, each separately able to see things invisible to others, and thus each with something of concern to say to the others.'* (Shotter, 1999, p.81)

Furthermore,

*...the contents of our 'inner lives' are not radically hidden 'inside' us as individuals; they are 'in' our living of our lives, 'in' the responsive ways in which we relate our momentary activities to all else occurring around us; they are 'shown' or 'exhibited' in the **internal relations** (philosophers would say) present in our activities.'* (Shotter, 1999, p.83)

So, activities of the psyche happen outside not inside the person and involve that person's participation. When the person is grieving then it could be said that the grief occurs in relationship and in interaction and requires the participation of the person in the process. This dialogical view of the self sees relationship as central to the process of living and also suggests that lives are less private than we may think.

***All human activity provides opportunity and location for grief work.***

In this finding (a catch all phrase) there is an indication that grief work is relational and dialogical. Traditional theorists in bereavement theory offer a narrow, largely intrapersonal view of what it is to work at grief. A relational and dialogical view of a grieving self suggests that grief work requires a poetic method not concerned with pattern and order and what is stable and repeatable. The findings of this study indeed



point to an idiosyncratic approach to loss and to associated grief work in which the person grieving is wise in knowing what is needed and when.

Shotter (1999) asserts that,

*'We are quite unused to the idea that the events of importance to us in our investigations are unique, novel, unmeasurable events, not repetitions' (p.84)*

It is in the living of our lives that grief work occurs. Unique, novel and unmeasurable experience appears to characterise it. Indeed the results of this study indicate that what becomes significant in doing grief work comes characteristically as an immediate happening, recognising something in the eyes of another, seeing a painting that speaks of the loss, choosing a story that speaks to a child of loss etc. Steiner (1989) describes such experiences as 'happening to us'. In the following extract he describes the experience in a poetic idiom.

*'That which comes to call on us – that idiom, we saw, connotes visitation and summons- will very often do so unbidden. Even when there is readiness, as in the concert hall, in the museum, in the moment of chosen reading, the true entrance into us will not occur by an act of will.....but each and everyone of us, however bounded our sensibility, will have known such unbidden, unexpected entrances by irrevocable guests.... I picked up and leafed through, scarcely attentive, a very thin book of poems (while waiting for a train).... I do not now recall whether I caught the intended train, but Paul Celan has never left me.' (p. 179-80)*

If the function of poetic talk is to strike or arrest us then what happens is that reality becomes frozen. We can take the frozen frame and search it for ways to relate to it. Our responses to aspects of it may be responses that might not have occurred without the 'call on us'. Poetic forms of talk such as *meetings, callings and entrances* invoke understandings of the gifts available from an understanding and trusting in dialogical relations.

### **The importance of the relationship to objects in grief**

The experience with the very thin book of poems illustrates the important role of physical objects in the process of grief. The participants in this study also referred to the importance of photographs.

I have noticed, in my work as a bereavement counsellor and play therapist that the movement of and placing of photographs during the grieving process appears to be linked to therapeutic movement during the process. In addition participants in this study have spoken of photographs as intrinsically linked to questions around loss. There does not appear to be any reference to this activity in the literature on theories and models of loss. What I have found is a very useful book by Linda Berman (1993) called *Beyond the Smile: The Therapeutic use of the Photograph*. She begins by asking the questions, '*Why do we like looking at photographs? Why do we often take such care with them, story them and cherish them like treasures?*' (p.1). In addition, a sociologist, Chaney (1992) argues that,

*'Most simply, photographs need conversation, texts, captions, systems of record and categories of social typology to give them a home and cast protective or interpretive colouring'. (p.122)*

Furthermore the role of these cultural artefacts is to capture a moment. They are created in the present tense, but the very act of catching them immediately alters their tense and they become consigned to the safekeeping of eternity. There is in this understanding a ritual character of photographic representation, in that the mundane matter of most photographs are invested with historical significance and entail a narrative account. Family photographers can be seen in this context as narrators. We can then see the institutionalisation of popular photography as a way of looking at ourselves. So, when we take pictures or look at them Chaney (1992) would argue, we are being dramatised in the convention of looking or picturing in styles of symbolic association. These experiences of interaction will contain images of identity, relationship and community in addition to personification, available as theatrical vernacular. This is a form of naturalised spectacle and therefore unassuming to us as we take part in it.

The sociological viewpoint gives explanation to the everydayness and at the same time the highly significant role of photographs in the lives of people. The participants in this study have made some interesting contributions to the role of photographs in their lives and the relationship to loss. In addition, in my work as a bereavement counsellor for a national voluntary agency, I have observed what people do with photographs in the experience of loss. At the time of working with one client, it was conventional to counsel people in their own homes. One young man grieving for his

deceased wife, married only for six weeks, started the counselling with wedding photographs in the main living room, gradually as he started to move therapeutically the photographs became reframed in the dining room. In addition he began to eat in the living room, a practise not approved of by his wife. During a particularly painful session, some two years after his death, he turned to the wedding photograph behind him and said. *'I'm crying because I know that one day I'll be taking the photograph out of that frame and replacing it with another'*. The interaction was powerful and after this moment the client began to move and some short time later the counselling ceased.

Berman (1993) includes a small section in her book on loss and bereavement and in that section describes photographs as,

*'... magically... .. making the dead person timelessly available, so that any unresolved feelings can therefore be explored 'with' the lost person'*. (p156).

Two of the participants in this study chose to put photographs out of sight in the early stages of loss, finding this timelessly available image too hard to manage. However, there was a sense in both examples of wanting to come back later and knowing where to find the painfully invoking images, when they would want to.

Berman (1993) describes a case where she is using photographs with a client and she notices that with one particular client, his present sense of emptiness at the end of a current relationship resonates with the losses of his past. She also noted that the

client's initiative in bringing pictures to sessions with him seemed to indicate a readiness to begin to face the depths of grief.

It appears from the results of this study and other examples from the literature that photographs have a fascinating role to play in grief work. I would argue that this is not just about the content of a photograph but also about being observant as to the *track* that a client takes with photographs both as objects and images in interactions. It is so everyday and common place, we may be, as therapists, less aware than we might be of the significance of activities with photographs.

Volkan et al (1976) sees the photograph as a *linking object*.

*'These are objects typically treasured by people unable to resolve grief- something that magically provides the illusion of communication, turning it on by musing over the object and turning it off by putting the object out of sight in an accessible place. Thus he can either recall the dead person or reject (kill) him in a pattern that reflects the ambivalent relationship of the past. The heavy emotional investment the mourner makes in such an object makes it a key with which to unlock the emotionality that then becomes manageable and even healing when the reasons for the previous failure to grieve are identified and both the emotionality experienced and the interpretations that accompany it are brought under scrutiny of the patient's observing ego. (p. 179)*

One participant in this study spoke of the dearth of family photographs and would have liked a record of his relationship to his mother through his childhood up until her death when he was twenty-one. He also felt the loss of photographs of grandparents

and envied the framed sepia and black and white photographs owned by others. One other participant spoke of treasuring the photograph of his sister. She was not deceased and he spoke of her affectionately as the only family member who had not abused or neglected him. He described always carrying her photograph with him in his wallet.

One client I had some years ago put family photographs in frames in a cluster on her mantelpiece so that the father could be protective of the spirit of the young daughter. How photographs are displayed or not seems to be very revealing of the dynamics of the grief experience. A relative of mine, the only surviving daughter from a family of three daughters noticed one Christmas that her two deceased sisters' photographs had new silver frames, whilst hers remained in a wooden one. Her husband jokingly suggested that she would be displayed in a new frame after her death. She told me that she had felt that in some way the sisters had become iconised, whilst she the remaining child, could sometimes disappoint her parents.

The literature and the results suggest that more research into the photograph would be helpful. I would be interested to track behaviour involving photographs through a grief experience and discover more about a largely invisible, taken for granted cultural practice. A multifaceted grief model could include such an angle.

The fascinating account of the role of the photograph in this study illustrates that objects are very important in the grief process. In addition to photographs many other objects appear to be important to the participants of this study and others I have counselled during the experience of loss.

### **Communicate with objects, images and sounds**

The results of this study show a positive aspect to communication with many objects images and sounds during grief. There appears to be nothing in the bereavement theory literature about the positive nature of a communication with objects, images and sounds. Bearing in mind that Gorer (1960) identified preoccupation with objects as dysfunctional and referred to the hanging onto objects in bereavement as *mummification*, as a denial of the reality of the loss, then what of the relationship between people and objects in this study?

I do note that there seems to be a desire to preserve the assumptive world, which existed before the loss and there are examples of an unwanted and resented world which is waiting to replace it. For example:

*'I have a very strong sense of dislocation. The nearest I can get to a location of her loss is a gold pen. She gave it to me for my twenty-first birthday. She died just after my birthday. I still have the pen, so my memories are very intensely invested in that pen. I regularly revisit that object'. (Depiction 1,)*

However, this example which is describing behaviour some twenty or more years after the loss seems to have a functional and positive aspect to it. In his career as a teacher trainer the participant further elucidates on the pen.

*'I use it (the pen) in teaching when I ask students to bring an object which is important to them and then use these objects as a way of looking at how children have dreams, hopes and goals and all those sorts of things, I bring my pen. '*

So, the pen, which has been hung on to for many years symbolises dreams, hopes and goals for this person. He is well aware that his life changed with the death of his mother, when he was twenty-one years old and with it his assumptive world (Parkes, 1975) and what is more, he looks forward with the pen acting as a kind of talisman for his future success in life.

It can be said that Gorer (1965) was more specifically focussing on the belongings of the deceased, believing that they should not be kept beyond a reasonable period of time. This is seen as denial of the reality of the death. In my experience, as a counsellor, clients tell me and it is my own experience that keeping objects that belong to the deceased, such as personal items and clothing is very common. In addition people will often dispose of these or pass them on to other members of the family as time passes and they begin to feel more at ease with the loss. In addition, the memory of clothing, although not kept, can be a comfort and enables us to retain something of the person always.

*'So, when I think of my mother I think of sensual things, music, her body, the ring. If I vision her, I see her in a summer dress and an apron; she always wore an apron because she was always in the kitchen. '(Depiction 1)*



The following poem addresses the personal belongings of the poet's mother in a rather beautiful way. The rawness is tangible in the grief held in this creative act.

*Tony Harrison **Timer***

*Gold survives the fire that's hot enough  
to make you ashes in a standard urn.  
An envelope of coarse official buff  
contains your wedding ring which wouldn't burn.*

*Dad told me I'd to tell them at St. James's  
that the ring should go in the incinerator.  
That "eternity" inscribed with both their names is  
his surety that they'd be together "later"  
I signed for the parcelled clothing as the son,  
The cardy, apron, pants, bra, dress*

*the clerk phoned down: 6-8-8-3-1?  
Has she still her ring on? (slight pause) Yes!*

*It's on my warm palm now, your burnished ring.*

*I feel your ashes, head, arms, breasts, womb, legs  
sift through its circle slowly, like that thing  
you used to let me watch to time the eggs.*

The interaction with the personal belongings has created a location for grief. The poem enables the moments of unbearable nostalgia to be recognised along with cries from the battlefield of life. This poem makes visible the invisible processes of interacting with objects in grief. It is so every day, so taken for granted an experience that we do not notice or remark on it. Yet, the experience of it is part of all loss experience.

*'This is the function of poetic forms of talk. For these forms of talk at first 'strike' us or 'arrest' us; they put reality, so to speak, on 'freeze-frame', and then 'move' us to search that freeze-frame for ways in which to relate ourselves responsively to aspects of it that might not otherwise have occurred to us.'* (Shotter, 1999, p.85-86)

Worden (1983, 1991) believes that acceptance of the loss is one of the tasks of mourning. I imagine most people would agree that keeping a room, belonging to the deceased exactly as it was at the time of death for many years would indicate that the bereft person was struggling with the loss. However, pathology does not feel to me to be a useful term. It comes from a medical vocabulary and indicates that grief can be healthy or unhealthy. Maybe it can be complicated, but I believe that one person's complication could easily be another's functional response and that movement will only occur when the person is ready to move. Csikszentmihalyi & Halton (1981) make the point that researchers have neglected a full investigation of the relationship between people and objects. If the transactions between people and the things they create constitute a central aspect of the human condition and past memories, present experiences, and future dreams of each person are inextricably linked to the objects

that comprise his or her environment, then one would expect objects to play a major part in the experience of loss. For it is argued that person-object transactions contribute to the model of self. (Csikszentminaly & Halton, 1981) If we retrieve our identity by first of all creating and secondly interacting with the material world and that transaction and the qualities of it largely determine us, then the things that surround us are inseparable from our identity. Therefore, if we lose someone the things that surround them or that we associate with them, must also be inseparable from their identities and therefore it is understandable that the objects we associate with them will play a part in our loss experience. Therefore the material objects that constitute our lives are very important and their relationship to the experience of loss deserves closer attention and respect, rather than being regarded as indicators of illness or complicated grief.

*'Why do we lose things? People don't like change, really they don't. I've been fortunate in that I've moved around a lot and I've had so many wonderful experiences. I'm always looking for that kind of thing. But, I think deep down, I don't like change. I look for constants in my life. I like little sentimental objects.'* (Depiction 2)

The above extract above indicates that when this participant cries out from his experience of loss he links the changes in life to his relationship with objects, which he describes as *constants*, further indicating that he looks for these constants in life in the material world.

Images can also offer potent locations for grief work. The same participant speaks of his relationship with music and visual art work.

*I can find treasure in other people's songs.*

*Sometimes I can see my life in a song or a painting.*

*I see myself echoed in other things. I attend to things like that. When I see something that has an echo of me in it I want to own it. I want to have it, to take it. I want to take it home with me and have it. I don't know if it's on a level with me keeping it away from others as well, because I see myself in it. (Depiction 2)*

He speaks of such an experience as finding treasure and personalizing it, taking it away from others and wanting copies (objects) to keep. When he speaks of the visual art work, *The Scream*, he speaks of it as 'wonderful' and reflecting for him one instant in time. He owns a copy and displays it in his home. His enthusiasm for a piece of art work that he describes as containing 'the torture in that one frame' suggests that he finds his relationship to music and visual images as one which is helpful to him. The theme of his interview was the loss of a safe childhood due to systematic abuse from a violent father.

I have not found anything in the literature on loss that acknowledges the therapeutic value of 'mourner initiated' interaction with objects, images and music. It appears that we have a capacity to seek out what we need from an infinite variety of objects,

images and sounds in our world including the particular ones that we can carry out grief work with.

### **Agency and the Mourner**

Trusting that we will find our own way in grief puts back autonomy and agency to the mourner. A model of grief which includes a trust in the self to find ways to grieve in our own worlds and in our interactions is in stark contrast to a medical /psychological expert driven view of what it is to grieve. Whilst Bolger (1999) and Greenburg & Bolger (2001) offer a critical view of a process to go through when experiencing emotional pain to get to transformation of the self and consequent healing they still largely assert that in order to process painful experience one needs to lose control and become broken and to further stay with the brokenness. I value the findings and see resonance with my own experience. However, it's not really trying to push back the boundaries to value all the ways that people process pain. Bolger's (1999) is akin to Worden's tasks of mourning (1983, 1991) and to Stroebe et al's (2001) dual process model of indicating the split between experiencing pain and times for restoration. The findings of this study, supported by a post-modern view of the self, as described by Shotter (1999) and Steiner (1989) offers a more radical view that sees human experience, *meetings, callings and entrances* as creative idiosyncratic ways of understanding and processing loss experience. It is my feeling that a dialogical self offers a broader palette to the scholar of human behaviour and does not pin the individual mourner down to having to go through a particular psychological process in order to heal loss experience. During my studies, counselling and in gathering other data for this study I have been impressed by the variety of unique and creative ways in which humans manage loss and the associated feelings. I tend to favour a view that

respects the wisdom of the mourner and sees the role of the counsellor as a facilitator of the client's experience. It is true that there may be discernable patterns, such as the one identified by Bolger (1999) but identifying one pattern does not make it the truth for all. Stage models of grief have been rightly criticised as being prescriptive and Bolger's (1999) work does not move significantly from this stance.

Spirituality is addressed in transpersonal models of the self. The bereavement literature is Spartan in its awareness and regard for spiritual knowledge and sensitivity that surround the bereavement experiences of many. The results of this study indicate that this is an important factor in the experience of loss.

### **Seeking spiritual knowledge and becoming spiritually sensitive**

The findings of this study include the seeking spiritual enlightenment and exploring the occult for contact with those who have died for some in grief. Some of the participants included a spiritual dimension to their experience of loss.

*'My childminder does the tarot and she's clairvoyant as well, and she was doing my cards a few months ago and she said 'Your dad's here and he's really upset and he keeps saying sorry to you'. (Depiction 3)*

*'I have also felt hands on my head from time to time, as if my hair is being stroked' (Self Chapter)*

*'I've been reading a lot of Buddhist texts and I'm learning to calm my voice...I've still got time to travel this journey, with this loss, so I'm going to travel it and be supportive to myself'. (Depiction 1)*

The literature on the theories of loss does not include a positive approach to spiritual contact with the dead. Parkes (1970) believes that contacting a medium is an indication of denial of the loss and that by seeking to communicate with spirit of the dead person we are denying that they are in fact gone forever. Hallucinations are not believed to be actual spirit sightings but indications that the bereaved are psychologically disturbed. Despite Marris's (1958) findings that the sighting of the deceased was very common amongst those not seeking psychiatric help, there is still a feeling in the bereavement literature that a spiritual sensation or sighting is pathological. West (2000) offers a more positive image of spiritual matters and mental health. In his book he explores how therapists might consider a spiritual dimension as part of the therapeutic relationship and what the implications of that may be. He suggests that therapy can be seen as a spiritual process. He draws attention to the overlap between spiritual direction and therapy. He also noted that within the therapy world it is the transpersonal therapists who are known for having particular interest in matters spiritual and work with awareness of this in their own lives and in the lives of their clients. Such a view supports the experiences of many in grief and acknowledges the importance of a spiritual dimension in the lives of the distressed.

From my own experience and the experience and knowledge I have of other counsellors and therapists, spiritual experience is respected by therapists and counsellors in practice. Some counsellors and therapists focus on spiritual matters in

the transpersonal approach. There does not appear to be a corresponding theory of bereavement that respects and values spiritual experiences in the process of experiencing loss. It would be helpful if spiritual dimensions of the loss experience could be accepted as a normal part of the loss experience. It appears from the results of this study that it is a significant part of the experience for many and I believe should be included without value judgement as part of the loss experience.

The key findings of this study are in harmony with a dialogical relational view of a grieving self. It seems on a close examination of the current literature that a dialogical and relational view of the self offers a powerful model which could recognise that the grieving self is functional and permanent, not a solid structure but a fluid one, manifesting as a *voice* that is active when needed creating itself constantly in interaction with the world. The idea of the grieving self as a subpersonality appears to be a possibility and there is much to support this idea in the findings of the study. However, it is limited to intrapersonal process and the findings of this study suggest that the experience of loss is not only intrapersonal but also interpersonal.

The post-modern literature offers further support for one of the characteristics of the grieving self. The timeless dimension of the self as one of the findings of this study is further elaborated on by Hermans (1999) he describes the dialogical self as combining temporal and spatial characteristics. A narrative approach focuses on the temporal dimension of narratives such as stages, periods and episodes. In Hermans' view the dialogical self sees time and space as equally important. The temporal dimension is a constituent feature of many narratives and stories. The spatial nature of the self is



expressed in more dynamic, flexible and personal terms around ideas of position and positioning of the self.

## **Secondary Findings**

In addition to the key findings there are secondary findings that have emerged from the data. The categories are considered below.

### **1. Form fantasy attachments**

There does not appear to be any references to this kind of action in the literature on bereavement. It does appear to be something of a lifestyle choice, sometimes temporary, sometimes permanent, in which those who have experienced significant losses in life are sometimes drawn to avoid attachments which are based in the real here and now world, with all the messiness that such a relationship involves. Instead they select another and fantasise about the other from afar. Much of the yearning and feelings of deep despair appear to be focussed onto the other. The feelings are deep and intense and usually not returned with such intensity, if indeed the *love object* is even aware of the other or if they are, the significance of the relationship for them is not so great. This is often described as falling hopelessly, unavoidably and rather quickly in love. These relationships can last for many years and I believe them to be a way of avoiding relationships that could end in separation and are also locations for feelings associated with the original losses. I have experienced this personally, both from the point of view of falling in love with a stranger and that lasting for many years, without development, as would a real relationship and from the other side of being the love object of another. In my counselling practice clients have brought this kind of material and in living my life I have come across it in other people. According to Freud (1917) *grief work* comprises of letting go of the old attachment and making a

new one. Those of us who find it difficult to let go of the old attachment, for many and various reasons, may be tempted to remain in the *betwixt and between* state, the middle, liminal state (threshold), described by van Gennep (1908, 1960 translation) in his three stage model of transition. In this transition, which can last for many years, we are crossing over from the old attachment to the possibilities of new ones. In the pain and depth of the experience of loss of a significant other, we can become *hooked* on a stranger, which in some way enables us to project feelings onto them. This is a relationship that remains in the liminal world of the grieving person. Sometimes there is reciprocity and both become *hooked* on each other.

*'Two people grieving for loved ones, saw them in the world of the other and so a relationship began, a relationship which came to be the location for the experience of loss.'* (The Self Chapter)

Maybe it is a radical relationship (Goodbread, 1997) Maybe we dream up the unsuspecting other and they become in the half-light of our movement across the threshold, the object of all our desires for attachment. Maybe it is a movement that becomes frozen or is so imperceptibly slow that we cannot discern movement at all, sometimes for months, sometimes for years. In flashes of insight we can become aware of the unconscious processes at work. Sometimes in the expression of such feeling in expressive art work such as composing a poem. Sometimes in a therapeutic or other emotionally supportive relationship we begin to recognise the forces at work and the defence mechanism, once known, can no longer function unselfconsciously. The relationship, a fantasy, holds us, protects us and serves us well for as long as it is undisturbed and fed. If pursued in reality, disappointment and pain can follow. For

example, the sad woman destroyed by the tragedy of unreturned love in the story, *Love's Executioner* (Yalom, 1989)

In this study the example of the man who '*recognised his world in me*', conducted a relationship, by letter over many years, in which it became clear that the interaction between us was the location for the grief he felt for his mother, who died when he was eighteen years old. In all his close intimate relationships he maintained a distance. Yet, with me, thousands of miles away, he felt deep intimacy and love. I know of three similar stories, at present, all unobtainable relationships and creatively fantasised. Perhaps when we are ready to trust another with our love, then we can move on and form satisfying relationships in the real world. Sadly, my experience of clients and others is that some seem to become locked in this state for many years.

## **2. Create fantasy places and inhabit them**

My own experience of twenty sessions of being a client in art therapy has shown me that I dealt with my loss experience by creating and temporarily inhabiting fantasy places. These places were not recognisable as actual places, although they contained some of the elements of actual places I had known. I felt that this experience created *aesthetic distance* (Grainger, 1990) and I was able to manage feelings associated with my loss experiences in childhood through these created places. Some of these places were buildings. Sometimes I depicted them from the outside and sometimes from the inside. Early childhood loss experiences were located in fantasy places and in real places in my memory. Jennings (1998) writes of the two realities that we inhabit. One is our perceptual world of the concrete and the other our forays into the imagination. She suggests that we are mature when we can distinguish one from the other. Is it

possible that loss experience can invite us to become temporally located in a safer imaginary place, even though maturity is not in question? Grainger (1990) writes of the concept of *aesthetic distance*. This is achieved when we need to stand back from an experience and are able to work on it through a creative process, without direct interaction with the experience. Paradoxically we can get closer to something the further away from it we are, if it is a painful experience. This is the basic premise of expressive arts therapies. I suggest that when experiencing the pain of loss any forays into an imaginary world, through the process of *aesthetic distance*, are part of what it is to be human and that any lack of clarity about which is the *real* world may indicate great need to locate grief away from everyday life at that moment in time.

Azad et al, (1997) in the catalogue from the photographic exhibition *Divine Facades: Views of Indian Architecture*, state that, '*When a building is broken, a way of life is lost along with it*' (p.8). This can further bring about a loss of one's identity and heritage. Perhaps when people are lost, buildings and other places become important locations for the relationship that has been severed. The results of this study show that, when a person is lost, a way of life is lost along with it and '*Buildings can be repositories of a family's history, a community's skills, a culture's continuity, a religion's sensitivities, a society's sensibilities*' (Azad et al p.8). One participant, separated from his wife, who had left him, spoke of the idea of the house as a repository of his family history.

*'The house has lots of memories. She sanded the floor in the bedroom. Every time I use that room now the memories are invested in the floorboards, in a sense.'*

(Depiction 1)

As are buildings, I notice that other kinds of places can be locations for repositories of a family history and subsequent locations for grief work. G, nine years old, bereft of his mother, in play therapy painted pictures of a beach that he had visited many times with his mother. He painted the beach in the dark, during his darkest times in therapy and painted it with a castle on the sand about to be flooded, just before she died. He also constructed a castle made of sand and attempted to prevent it from cracking and tumbling down, at a time when he was very distressed and his mother's death was imminent. It was also with warm, dry sand that he interacted when he was beginning to come to terms with the fact that she had died, despite his denial that she would not right up until her death. *'With a soft kiss she blew the sand and every grain exploded into the world'*. It is interesting that the real memory of a beach and the sand that would have been a large part of G's world, shared with his mother, became the medium for his engaging with her illness and subsequent death. It could be said that the very sand was the location for his grief work, both the memory of times together with his mother on a sandy beach and the sand tray in the play therapy room. Lowenfeld (1979) believed that a tray of sand with miniature objects including, living creatures, such as people and animals, fantasy and folk-lore figures, scenery, transport and other miscellaneous objects can provide a place for representation of,

*'...thought simultaneously in several planes at once, must allow of representation of movement and yet be sufficiently circumscribed to make a complete whole, must combine elements of touch and sensation, as well as sight, and be entirely free from necessary relation to reality.'* (Lowenfeld, 1979 p.4)

Clearly sand contained in a deep tray can offer much to children when working on grief in therapy. My experience, as a lecturer in counselling, is that students in training can also benefit from such work. The sand world can offer an opportunity to work in what Lowenfeld (1979) would call a *gap* between the world of the child and the adult. The sand world can therefore offer a location for mutual understanding. It is a place where picture thinking and action can happen. I suggest that the sand world can offer a location for the adult or child to work on material located in the liminal world, where the person in grief becomes an inhabitant, in the world of *betwixt and between* (van Gennep, 1908, 1960 translation), whilst moving through a process of loss and taking part in idiosyncratic grief work.

### **3. Experience difficulty with intimacy in personal relationships**

This has been of personal interest to me and recently, in a co-operative inquiry group of people who met to explore the idea of loss in early childhood, it was felt to be an issue for many of the group, all who had experienced significant early loss, such as separation from a main caregiver or death of a parent. The work of this co-operative inquiry group is yet to be recorded. However, it has also emerged as a concept within this study. Fear of being vulnerable, being hurt again, experiencing the pain of loss again and keeping the real feeling self locked away from others are themes that run through the depictions in the results of this study.

The work on attachment theory indicates that when a child experiences the loss of the mother (main caregiver) he or she tries to become reunited. If the child fails to find her or him then the child will become despairing and in time, detached. Losses in

childhood, both short and long term have shown to have profound consequences (Parkes, 2001, Bowlby, 1953)

Developments since attachment theory and further research, identifies attachment patterns for adults, based on childhood patterns and this leads to a category of insecurely attached people who have experienced vulnerable childhoods and predicts the type and intensity of symptoms they may experience following bereavement in adult life( Parkes, 1991) In addition, the knowledge I have of clients in therapy leads me to concur that there does seem to be a strong basis for believing that intimacy could be an issue for vulnerable adults. Interestingly, the co-operative inquiry group comprises of counsellors, all vulnerable in terms of attachment behaviour and all attracted to the field of bereavement counselling.

Parkes (1991) notes that there are variations although all those adults experiencing psychiatric problems after a loss would fall into one the following categories

1. Prone to lasting grief when relationships end
2. When relationships end do not cry and are unable to express grief
3. Inclined to alcoholism when faced with loss

The results of this study would not refute Parkes's findings. However, the three categories above would not necessarily be seen as indicators of *complicated grief*. For instance one of the research participants describes an inability to express grief for the loss of his wife, and yet he was able to make his way through his loss process and is now settled into a new relationship, without psychiatric intervention.

*'What's strange is that when I cry, I cry more for the loss of my cats than I do for her.*

*Isn't that silly? (Depiction 1)*

Perhaps the only difference between those seeing a psychiatrist for complicated grief and those who do not is that some get into the system and some do not. Behaviour that can seem insane in grief is not uncommon in my experience or McLaren's (1998). Although, in making this statement I am also acutely aware of people who may be need psychiatric care due to grief triggering more serious conditions, such as psychosis.

Perhaps normal grief is more complex and complicated than has been thought. People do not present for medical intervention and therefore assumed not to be indulging in behaviours thought more likely for those considered to be complicated in their grief process by the medical profession.

The concept of intimacy and the difficulty to achieve this for some counsellors in personal relationships has been explored by a student, Carol Birmingham on the masters program in counselling at the University of Durham (Birmingham, 2003). The findings were as follows.

*'In terms of intimacy I have learned so much from this reconstruction – the ambiguity, the desire, the threat, the incompleteness, the not revealing already discussed.*

*Following Lerner's points this immaturity has its origins in early family relating with the result I transferred and carried it into my adult life. I was never able to achieve*



*the 'genuine intimacy' referred to by Amodeo and Wentworth (1986) when someone is able to identify their feelings, recognize their needs, and communicate these responsibly.*

*And here I come to a further milestone on my journey of illumination – the realization that my fundamental fear of being genuinely intimate has constantly undermined any chance of achieving such intimacy. As a result I have managed my parallel desire for intimacy via a strategy of what I have come to call 'one-sided intimacy', that is the experience of encouraging closeness and revealing from others whilst being unable to reciprocate.' (Birmingham, 2003, p.27)*

In her conclusion she states that,

*'My own exploration of this complexity has in itself been a process of revealing and sharing that I feel has informed me as counsellor, client and person, with the learning for each of these parts of me reflecting layers of meaning that are bound inextricably to each other. So it is that I have been able to reflect upon my learning about intimacy in relation to practice and see how this relates to my experience and knowledge in the other areas of my life. From a sense of unease about intimacy I have, as Ely et al (1997) suggest, used my 'disequilibrium' as a force for change.' (Birmingham, 2003, p.30)*

Birmingham's (2003) findings have resonance with me and her point about becoming aware and using this unease as a force for change is an honest and brave one. My feeling is that many involved in counselling are practising 'one-sided intimacy' due to

early experiences in the family and it would be challenging indeed to examine this aspect of the practice of counselling.

Further exploration and study to learn more of this relationship vulnerability would be interesting and an area for more empirical work. It appears that the struggle for intimacy for some when located in childhood loss experience can be achieved when relationships of psychological safety are offered in adulthood.

*'Today I am able to write this and to know that I can experience intimacy and that I can embrace the moment. Loss has taught me about the meaning of closeness and human intimacy'. (Self Chapter)*

Paradoxically, it appears that profound loss experience may be the catalyst for the vulnerable adult to become more trusting and to achieve intimacy. The existential realisation that death comes to us all, once grasped, can lead to a more courageous approach to life in general. The risks required to form close relationships may be taken after a painful and difficult loss experience.

#### **4. Live in an inner world whilst operating in an outer one**

Lindemann (1944) writes of feelings of unreality whilst in the stage of acute grief. The participants in this study give many examples of living ordinary, *together* lives in parallel with feelings of unreality. I suggest that these feelings of unreality are more prominent and common than is considered to be the case. In addition the unreality becomes a way of life, rather than a temporary state for some who have been damaged

by severe loss experience. One participant speaks of a series of movements he performs to reintegrate himself back into the world. He also speaks of the difficulty he faces if he is interrupted by anyone in the process.

*'When I'm at my emotional peak, when I'm really traumatised, I just need to be by myself, because I can't cope with them. I can't cope with them distracting me and stopping my methodical reintegration. I do things step by step. I've got this little thing I go through. I wouldn't be able to write it down. I have these little steps I follow to get myself back to normal, so to speak.'*

*'Sometimes folk pollute it, pollute my time. They contaminate the time ... (Depiction 2)*

This person was not in acute grief. He was experiencing the aftermath of the loss of a safe childhood. He held down a very responsible job in a managerial capacity. His grief had enormous consequences for him and at times he felt traumatised by it. Yet, he had developed a series of movements which he performed like a ballet and this enabled him to reintegrate into the social world. He had never spoken about his childhood before and had never seen a counsellor or mental health professional. The theories on loss do not account for the wisdom of this young man. He had found the resources within himself to do his own grief work and to manage his feelings from his inner world in his outer world. I suggest that we have such a capacity to know what we need to do and maybe outside intervention causes us to give up on our own capacities to self-heal.

In the Self -dialogue I wrote of feeling that I was living in an inner world and operating in an outer one. This indicates to me that we have a capacity to be quite private in doing grief work. To the outside world we are OK and yet we know we are not and yet we cannot communicate to others how we feel. When my brother took his own life some sixteen years ago I wanted to go to local bereavement centre 'Drop-in'. I struggled with the idea, feeling desperate to talk and at the same time unable to do so. I walked backwards and forwards past the door for some time and finally left unable to walk through the door. I suggest that grief can trap an individual within themselves and to the outside world can appear to be functioning quite normally. I do not believe this to be complicated grief or abnormal, even though it can go on for sometime. I suggest that it is part of normal grieving to function in these two worlds at the same time. Many clients have spoken to me of this experience in grief.

### **5. Feel out of kilter with the rest of humanity**

The participants in this study have suggested that they feel out of kilter with the rest of the world. The literature of grief does not address this feeling other than explaining it as a change in the assumptive world (Parkes, 1971)

The results of this study would suggest that this feeling of being out of kilter is more about a change in the self that is noticed rather than just a change in the environment because there is someone or something missing now. Lindemann (1944) suggests that there are three tasks to perform in order to get back in kilter:

1. *Emancipation from the bonds of the deceased;*

2. *A re-adjustment to the environment from which the deceased is missing;*
3. *The formation of new relationships.*

In this way we *need* to modify the emotional energy invested in the lost person and to address the self. The self-identity of the mourner has to be modified in order to live in the world without the deceased. He does not say how the tasks can be performed.

Csikzentminly & Halton (1981) expose that we interact with the material world as one way of doing this.

Lindemann's (1944) views on morbid or chronic grief are not helpful. Denial is cited as the prevailing reason for lack of movement. I would suggest that many people classified as in denial are in fact moving through a grief experience and if what they were actually doing was acknowledged as grief work then the need to explain lack of movement would disappear. For example, someone interacting with the material world such as, buying a copy of a painting or listening to music or a song is processing their loss and just because they are unable to speak about the loss or form new relationships it does not mean that they are stuck in grief. If those professionals working in the field could acknowledge the highly intensive efforts of those experiencing loss, then perhaps those in grief would have more confidence in their wisely chosen tasks and not fear pathology in their process.

Furthermore creativity in working at loss includes experiences whilst sleeping in the dream worlds we inhabit.

## 6. Find ways to accept the loss in our dream worlds

Many clients in counselling speak of their dreams when experiencing loss. It is fairly common for people to meet up with lost one in a dream.

*'I can remember having dreams that I was meeting up with Stephen and being so delighted to see him, only to wake and find it all to be untrue. I dreamt of him in his perfect world, surrounded by laughter, his dead son, natural beauty and working with wood, a love of his life. I also dreamt of a chance meeting in the street during which we discussed the fact that he was dead. This was the last dream I had of him.'* (Self Chapter)

Other dreams are less straightforward and can be confusing or disturbing. Sleep disturbances are also common and this can add to a weariness already felt in grief.

G, the child in the play therapy case study, missed his dead mother so much that he attempted to bring her back to life by performing spells, even though he was told that she may come back as an evil spirit pretending to be her and the idea terrified him. Yet his desire to bring her back was so strong that he continued to will her return. In sleep he was terrified that she would appear and he dreamt of her returning and haunting him. In waking hours, he talked of being followed by a Sparrow Hawk. He described seeing it in three separate places and was sure that it was the same bird. These disparate geographical locations afforded him opportunity to ponder as to the reason for the bird following him. I asked him if he liked it. He said he did not. I could only imagine that being followed by a bird or by the imagined spirit of a dead mother must be disturbing for a young man entering puberty. I suggested telling the

bird not to follow him. He received this suggestion with scepticism. On my return home one windy, stormy night I lit a fire and sat in the glow of it looking out of my window onto a rural Pennine landscape. I noticed something on the garden wall. As I peered closer I saw it to be female Sparrow Hawk. A rare sight at such close quarters and I immediately remembered the session with G. It was some weeks later that he asked if he could bring his live birds to the session. After this, G no longer spoke of being followed either in his dreams or in his everyday life. Within the therapy with me G he had come through this part of his loss and moved forwards. He began to sleep peacefully for the first time in many months.

There is of course a history of working with dreams in psychotherapy and counselling. In this instance G dealt with the material from his dream in the natural world. The metaphorical expression of the love of a mother for her son and her desire to be with him was acknowledged through *aesthetic distance* (Grainger, 1990) The theories of loss acknowledge the restlessness and sleep disturbances of the grieving experience (Lindemann, 1944, Parkes, 1965, 1970) However, the wisdom of the individual to deal with dreams and loss is not mentioned. The case material that I have provided suggests that when a person is offered a safe therapeutic relationship then they can begin to find the inner resources needed to work on dreams during grief.

Other repetitive dreams of terror and distress are described by the participant who was abused by his father as a child. I would suggest that this dream holds the material for him to work on in his life, should he ever feel able to do so. At present he feels unable to see a therapist.

Many clients speak of the exhaustion of grief and the need to find a sanctuary or asylum. The results of this study indicate that whilst in retreat important grief work appears to be in place.

## 7. Seek asylum

van Gennep's transitional schema (1908, 1960 trans.) describes a process of action and waiting. In the waiting and resting part of grief work I would suggest, in contrast to Stroebe et al's Dual Process Model (2001) that when we are resting from feelings to do with loss we are in fact still doing grief work. I would suggest that in our silence, calmness, taking time out, seeking asylum and in many other non-active ways we are still taking part in grief work. It may have the consequence of being restorative, as argued by Stroebe et al (2001) but this, I would suggest, is not all that happens. During restoration we are still in interaction with people, places and objects.

The findings of this study suggest that finding peace in a place of safety is commonly sought after when experiencing loss. Bachelard (1958, trans. 1964, 1994) writes of the nest as the image for a powerful refuge. He quotes Hugo's story of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and admires that in one short sentence Hugo associates the images and beings of the function of inhabiting.

*'For Quasimodo, he says, the cathedral has been successively "egg, nest, house, country and universe". (p.90)*

He further notes that by multiplying these images the poet makes the reader keenly aware of the power of various refuges. He goes on to say that,



*'Thus, well-being takes us back to the primitiveness of the refuge. Physically the creature endowed with a sense of refuge, huddles up to itself, takes to cover, hides away, lies snug, concealed. If we were to look in our vocabulary for verbs that express the dynamics of retreat, we should find images based on animal movements of withdrawal, movements that are engraved in our muscles.'* (p.91)

Bachelard (1958, trans. 1964, 1994) observes that it gives us pleasure to withdraw into a corner. In this work he explores many kinds of refuges from the humble hut, cellar to garret in a house, drawers, chests and wardrobes, nests, shells, corners, miniatures, the concepts of intimate immensity, the dialectics of outside and inside and the phenomenology of roundness. The book is described, by the publishers, as remaining, after thirty years since it was first published as *'one of the most appealing and lyrical explorations of home.'* It shows us that the way we perceive of home and other shelters, shapes our thoughts, memories and dreams. This poetic work has much to offer a model of loss that is multifaceted. The results of this study indicate that a loss of home due to the loss of parents can be devastating for a child or young person.

*'When my mum died the notion of home disappeared. I haven't had a home to go to since I was twenty-one years old. With the loss of my mother came the loss of home....'* (Depiction 1)

The participant above spent a lot of time and money on making a home for himself after the loss of his wife in later life.

*'I never really relied on the security of my home. Or, maybe I did subconsciously. I never thought I did. I think it was just something I was complacent to. I always imagined it would be there when I needed it, selfishly, now all of a sudden it's gone.'*

(Depiction 2)

This participant spoke of the private nature of his home life and the need to get away with a tent in the mountains to find sanctuary. He also spoke of retreating into a shell when life became unsettled or people let him down.

The concept of retreat, home or asylum has been a feature of the stories of loss from the participants. I suggest that it be addressed as a location for grief work in future research into loss.

The desire to hide away can contrasted with a desire to be more present, in fact, to be fully present as an authentic person living life in congruence with values and desires.

The findings of this study indicate that the experience of loss can be the 'jump start' required to shed an inauthentic way of being in the world.

#### **8. Begin to dismantle the conditions of worth.**

*There is a desire to shed the inauthentic self. Feelings of incongruence within the self can be 'jump started' by loss.*

Parkes (1975) states that, '*Crisis can lead to the stars as well as to the grave*'. Indeed many clients I have counselled or worked with in play therapy have become involved with aspects of life that they may not have, had the loss not happened to them. People

do indeed grow through loss experiences. The results of this study concur with Parkes's view that growth can come out of loss. I wonder whether it could be said that loss in some way *jump starts* the process of self-awareness that can lead to the dismantling or the dissolving of the *conditions of worth*, believed to be by Rogers (1957) the block to authenticity and the movement towards self-actualisation. I have noticed that clients who have experienced significant loss do sometimes begin to address the development of self and dissatisfaction with the way that they have until this time led their lives. The loss experience can sometimes motivate a person to change in dramatic ways. One client I had who had experienced multiple losses in his adult life in addition to an abusive childhood entered into a depressive state and eventually gave up his job, a job that he was striving to prove himself in relentlessly, and started to enjoy a simpler life, became more creative and left his depression behind for a more tranquil future. The physical transformation that accompanied these other life style changes was so great that on arrival for his last session, he passed my window on entering the building and I did not recognise him.

Apart from Parkes' (1975) paper there does not appear to be anything in the research literature that links loss with this illustrated process of a flight to change in some permanent way, although it is documented by Levine (1986) where he writes of a woman whose daughter's death happened whilst the family were on holiday. The child was dragged out to sea by strong waves. The story becomes more horrific as he describes the circumstances and the body is washed up after being attacked by sharks.

*'The potency of that grief was so intense she had to let go, to surrender. All the places she hid were illuminated in a blinding flash. A year later, she told me it was the most*

*profound experience of her life and that, "It opened me. It turned my life around. My priority became to touch and understand and open to the hearts of others". (p.87)*

I also note that asylum was not an option for this woman. All hiding places were illuminated. There was no possibility of retreat. Levine (1986) believes that such tragedy and loss can hold the seeds of grace. He would describe grace as having a sense of connectedness. So whilst what brings us to grace is not always a pleasant experience it takes us to something essential in ourselves.

#### **A meta-structure to hold all the findings- van Gennep's schema**

In consideration of the key findings and the other findings from the study I have noticed that all those experiencing loss appear to be living in a state of *betwixt and between*. The process of loss begins with a rupture to everyday life and the impact of this on the person is powerful. A process begins of transformation. For some time the person is not in the old world (the world before the loss) and not yet in the new world (the world that exists where the person will have a new social role). The changing situation leaves the person in a state of *liminality*. I suggest this is where counsellors meet their grieving clients in the world of *betwixt and between*. As already alluded to in many places in this discussion of results, the anthropological literature offers a suggestion for a meta- structure that can incorporate a post-modern dialogical relational theory of the *grieving self* and consequent grief work in loss illustrated by the findings of this study.

So far, I am conscious of the traditional clinical *reductionist* nature of explanations concerning grief work and the richness of the data from this study with the consequent results. What I feel drawn to is van Gennep's (1908, 1960 translation) classic work *Rites de Passage*. This 3 part schema offers a template for all experiences involving transition. In addition it offers a focus to a change in social role in addition to personal transformations. Interestingly, his work is not referred to in any of the bereavement literature that offers psychological theories for loss. The anthropological literature offers reverence to his seminal work (Hockey, 2002) and it has been hugely influential in anthropological ethnographic studies. I will refer to his work and see if the results from this study can be transposed onto his model of transition with more success than prevailing theories of bereavement.

The results of this study indicate that *feeling out of kilter* is a part of major loss experience. In the Self -dialogue I relate my experience as a child of feeling out of kilter with others, not understanding why, or able to make a connection between my preceding loss experiences and my then current inability to stay away from home without feeling distressed and ashamed of my apparent inadequacy to cope with minor separations. The process by which we become back in kilter appears to be adequately explained in van Gennep's schema (1908, 1960 translation) Transition is the focus with an exploration into the idea that change in life is about separation and being reunited. In life, both for individuals and for groups the process of separation involves metaphorically dying and being reborn. In this process we change form as we pass from one state of being to another. The process involves acting, ceasing to act by waiting and resting and then to begin acting again, but acting in a different way.

This tripartite schematic structure involves;

1. The passage out of a previous phase (separation), including the social status, that accompanies that stage.
2. An ambiguous time in which the individual is in a state of *betwixt and between* two fixed positions. Transitional and threshold rites are in play.
3. The phase of re-entry into a new time with a new social position

Transposing loss onto this schema would indicate that when someone experiences loss, they will move from one social position to another. If one of the parts of the 3-part schema is dominant, then the others will not be so important at anytime during the process of change, until the change is actually achieved. In this way grieving can become rooted in an extended process of transformation. The bereaved are located in this schema temporarily, whilst they transform. van Gennep (1908, 1960 trans.) states that he would have expected to find that when someone dies, the mourners would be involved in many rites of separation. In fact, his study data reveals that the rites of separation are few and simple and the transition rites are characterised by long duration and complexity.

*'Mourning, which I formerly saw as simple as an aggregate of taboos and negative practices marking an isolation from society of those whom death, in its physical reality, had placed a sacred, impure state, now appears to me to be a more complex phenomenon. It is a transitional period for the survivors, and they enter it through*

*rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society (rites of the lifting of mourning)' (van Gennep, 1908, 1960 trans. P. 147)*

This supports the findings of this study which indicate that grief is complex and can be long lasting. In addition, the results of this study indicate that the liminal phase in grief can last a very long time. van Gennep suggested that this is in relation to the closeness of the attachment.

*'During mourning, the living mourners and the deceased constitute a special group, situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and how soon living individuals leave that group depends on the closeness of their relationship with the dead person' (van Gennep, 1908, 1960 trans. P. 147)*

However losses other than loss of persons, such as loss of a safe childhood, do not fit into the above explanation. Maybe some people have to live with the knowledge that they can never move into a new life. A child who has been abused will always be an adult with a *child* that has been abused and this person may mourn the loss of a safe childhood always. This is not to say that they cannot find happiness in later life but the abusive childhood can never lead to a safe childhood. The results of this study indicate that some losses are life long. This would suggest, that in contrast to van Gennep's (1908, 1960 trans.) concept of a temporary state of liminality could, in fact for some, become a permanent one.

I suggest that, for those mourners who can move through the schema, it is in this central phase of liminality that people find themselves struggling and feeling

impatient and exhausted with grief, stuck and wanting to move on to the new phase. This feeling often brings the bereaved into counselling. This is an ambiguous time in which the bereft feel as if they are out of kilter and it could be explained as being *betwixt and between* the two fixed positions of separation and re-entry into a new time and new social position. All intense grief work can be said to happen in this central time in a state of *betwixt and between*. The bereaved are, in fact, living in an outer world whilst operating in an inner world. The tasks in hand which constitute grief work are located on the *threshold* of a new life in a new time. Bolger's (1999) findings support the concept of a transformation through the process of 'brokenness' and 'staying with brokenness'. The findings of this study can be accommodated within the meta-structure and allow for greater diversity in how an individual makes the transition and eventual transformation. It may be through 'brokenness' and it may be via other means that movement occurs.

This tripartite schema allows for idiosyncratic grief work. It does not offer judgements about what or how tasks are carried out. It merely observes that the individual moves by acting, ceasing to act by waiting and resting and then beginning to act again and this time in a different way. The agency of the individual is acknowledged and respected. There are no time limits, suggestions of right or wrong actions, just a respectful acceptance of waiting and resting. Within this template people can feel free to move or not move and to know that each action brings about change and the accumulation of action and waiting and resting results in re-entry into a new time in which they achieve a new social position. In terms of loss of relationship, for example, they move forward without the relationship they had before into a new social place.



I suggest that Gorer (1965) was on the right track in terms of identifying the intensity of grief work, when he noticed that previous researchers had tended to write as though the bereaved were alone in the world and had nothing else to focus on in life but the loss they were experiencing. He noticed that it was as if they had no other occupation but to come to terms with the loss and work through the grief. Walter (1998) asserts that much the same could be said now. Gorer's (1965) study recognises that the experience of loss and grief are not exclusively or mainly a private and psychological one. He was aware that people do their loss experience in the process of living their everyday lives in relation to others. In providing a Sociology of Bereavement, he saw the end of mourning not as 'letting go' of the loved one but as becoming emotionally restored and able to function fully in the society to which we belong. This approach of doing grief would sit comfortably within the schema designed by van Gennep (1908, 1960 trans.) and would also allow, for example, the acceptance of the past, emotional restoration and a moving on to fully function in society for an abused child, for example.

In effect, being out of kilter is recognised in this classic anthropological schema for transition. The results of this study also indicate that grief is an interactive process and that our grief is located in these interactions as much as it is located within us. Therefore, it is intrapersonal and an interpersonal experience. Bruner (1994) asserts that learning takes place in interaction. If this is the case then surely it is reasonable to suppose that the experience of loss takes place there too.

The findings have been considered and discussed against current literature and research. In the next section considers the trustworthiness of this study in relation to criteria included as part of the research design.

### **A critical review of the effectiveness of the measures implemented to ensure validity**

Are my results trustworthy? I take the categories (McLeod, 1994, pp.98-101) and consider the process of carrying out the research in relation to categories considered in the research design.

#### ***1. Clarity and Comprehensiveness of the description of the research procedures employed***

*'Just as the dancer relies on the spine for the power and coherence of the dance, so the qualitative researcher relies on the design of the study. Both are elastic.'*  
(Janesick, 1994)

This study has been clear, comprehensive and coherent due to a structured research design (Alred, 1998) However, within the discipline of form there was a willingness to see the design as flexible in order to respond to an unfolding process of exploration, whilst always returning to the initial design to check that the process was within the heuristic method based on a philosophical foundation that sees reality as:

*'There is no objective meaning to reality; all meaning is a human creation influenced by social and cultural factors.'* (Lynch, 1996)

My epistemological stance has been solid throughout the study. I believe that my approach and methods have been flexible and sensitive (McLeod, 2001) and I have opened up meanings around the experience of loss that have not previously been understood including the new concept of *The Grieving Self*.

In this thesis the procedural detail is in evidence. The methods chapter sets out the stall clearly and in some detail with a summary table describing which data were collected, in which sequence and how the material was analysed. The Heuristic research process was carefully described and evaluated against the literature on research methods in the social sciences, with an emphasis on the reasons for choosing Heuristic method as opposed to other methods such as, grounded theory, transpersonal and auto-ethnographic methods.

In addition there was a detailed and innovative slant on the way research participants were selected, some via a *dreaming up* process (Mindell, 1982)

## ***2. Sufficient contextualisation of the study***

The study is qualitative, small scale and located within the UK. However, the ethnographic data was gathered in national and international contexts.

The results of this study have relevance to the counselling and play therapy communities in the contexts of their own work at this present time. The findings are

applicable to counsellors and play therapists within their own cultural settings. suitable for consideration for the implications for their own practice both within and outside of the European and North American context. This year I have taught play therapy for four weeks in Kenya in addition to presenting at international conferences over the last 4 years, attended by Africans from over 13 African countries, and have received positive feedback in both locations on the idea of a *grieving self* and the concept of grief as being located in interaction. What people do when experiencing loss appears to be idiosyncratic on a personal level and this idea appears acceptable to others, whatever their context. What I have found is that, for example, Worden's tasks of mourning (1991) have been challenged as disregarding the taboos of certain groups, when it comes to speaking about the deceased. The views I have held and the results of this study have been accepted by others as respectful of cultural differences in my experiences of presenting them to others.

### ***3. Adequacy of the Conceptualisation of data***

The concept of a *Grieving Self* emerged from this exploration. It is an adequate concept based on the results of this study.

I also offer the idea of a simple model as a habitat for this complexity of experience. I did not start off with the intention of finding such a model. However the data led me to discover it. My intention was to explore and see where that exploration took me. Where it took me was away from a more complicated model for the experience of loss to an accepting of the complexity of it for each individual and a desire to offer a model to house it, in a schema, already in existence in the anthropological literature,

van Gennep, 1908, 1960 translation). This offers a way of locating the experience of loss that accepts it without judgement, without ideas around, health and pathology, without timescales, without ideas about the rightness or wrongness of the human reaction to a loss experience. What people do when experiencing loss was depicted and the data analysed and findings of what people do are that it is wise. It is a wisdom that appears to be present both in young children and adults, when confronted with the experience of loss. As such, this wisdom and agency of the grieving needs to be trusted, nurtured and given shelter. The schema of the *Rites de Passage* offers such a sanctuary. I have gathered together my results and offered a suggestion for where they might be usefully understood, in the light of existing knowledge about human transition

#### ***4. Systematic consideration of competing explanations/interpretations of the data***

The self-dialogue and the interview data were both handled in two different ways. First, it was depicted as part of the classic heuristic method and then the data was considered again and analysed using an empirical phenomenological method. In addition there was ethnographic data to consider and integrate into the results and eventual findings. There was a marked consistency in all data to support the results of the study.

When I started to gather data for this study I was just beginning to work as a bereavement counsellor, some fourteen years ago. Undoubtedly, I will have come to accept some of the ideas in this final thesis as supported by my own life experience as a practitioner. It would be impossible for me not to do so. Part of my ethnographic learning is in place and has influenced my practice as a therapist for some years now.

The interviews supported and confirmed the ethnographic knowledge and added the importance of the concept of home and sanctuary within the experience of loss. The interview results coloured in for me a black and white awareness and understanding and led me to reach a new view that the more complex the grief experience the more simple the model needed to offer it a structure. My ethnographic understandings had led me to believe that prevailing theories of grief were too simple. The new data and consequent depictions and analysis led me to consider and assert in the results that the prevailing models were not simple enough.

I imagine that the data from this study could be taken and understood in other ways according to prevailing belief systems and current philosophical and theoretical positions in the loss literature. For example, those people with different ideas about pathology and the temporary/permanence of grief may take the data and consider the concept of the *grieving self* to be indicative of chronic or pathological grief. I offer my findings with humility and grace and welcome more debate.

##### **5. *Credibility of the researcher (reflexivity)***

The nature of this thesis has as its core the idea that the self of the researcher is prominent. The self-study forms a large part of the data for the heuristic study. I have also been honest about the relationships I experienced with participants and the subsequent value of the data gathered. I have not included too much of my process in writing up the research and I could have done. It has been written up during a period in which I am going through more potential loss experience and maybe I have chosen

to step back during the writing period in order to protect myself. I have kept a journal of my experience and it is not available to the latter text of this study. What I have done is told my stories and considered my experiences with honesty and courage. Some of my disclosures were painful and difficult. I hope that my preparedness to be congruent in the telling will afford me credibility by the reader.

#### ***6. Experiential authenticity of the material***

All accounts of experience in this thesis feel real and authentic to me. They have been generously given and lovingly collected over the years. I feel humbled by the interviews and the possibilities in my life to be alongside those experiencing the many facets of the grief experience. I would like to honour all the contributors to this study and feel that this is one of the strongest elements of the work before the reader.

Copies of the transcripts from the interviews were received by two of the interviewees with interest and both believed that the interview data was accurate in its depiction of them in their experiences.

#### ***7. Use of triangulation (including negotiation with informants/testimonial validity)***

For ethical reasons I chose not to return to the interviewees later with further depictions and analysis. One participant asked not to be contacted again and the other was in the early process of beginning a new relationship and I felt that returning with this work for comment may interfere with his process and chose not to do this. The third participant did not ask to see the transcript or be involved after the interview in

any way. It felt appropriate to respect all the participants' views and also to realise the power of the material and to make ethical decisions based on this knowledge.

*'It is worth viewing the task of negotiating with informants as similar to giving feedback to counselling clients, and to follow the same principles of careful timing, tentativeness and creating conditions of trust and safety.'* (McLeod, 1994, p.100)

With regard to the above I have triangulated the study by handling the data from the self-study and the data from the interviews in two different ways, one as depictions as part of Heuristic method and the other as analysis in an empirical phenomenological way. The ethnographic data was collected over years of practice and the results from both did not find the data from each source to be in conflict. There was a high degree of resonance. In addition the literature review was carried out after the results and has been used to evaluate the findings against current literature. Whilst prevalent theories of grief in medical models have value and show a developmental process of change and refinement the results of this study offer concepts which fit comfortably with the developing debate and ideas in sociology, anthropology and current researchers in clinical practice.

## **8. Catalytic validity**

It has been easier to assess whether or not the experience of taking part in this research has been a positive enriching one for some of the participants more than others. (Kvale, 1983) I am in regular contact with one person, one other is available to me and the third out of contact now. The participant that is out of contact concerns me



the most as there were disclosures during the interview that were revelatory for him. I hope that the self-awareness that came from the experience will serve him well. He was initially very enthusiastic to continue involvement and did speak to me on a couple of occasions about the content of his interview with me and the impact of it on his life. However, in a short time he moved out of the locality and we lost contact. One of the participants was very enthusiastic about the experience of the interview and wrote suggesting we continue the work by writing an academic paper together, which we did and it was subsequently published.

### ***9. Replication***

Although it would be impossible to replicate this study, I believe that although the interviewees in this study were few in number there was enough resonance in the material produced with my experience of client work in counselling and in play therapy to suggest that the findings could be relevant and applicable to others experiencing loss. My conference presentations and other publications have given me opportunity to gain much feedback from other professionals working in the same field. This experience plus my experience as a counsellor and play therapist trainer encourage me to believe that the results of this research are not idiosyncratic and relate only to the participants in the interviews and me.

#### **What I would have done differently or the same**

With hindsight there are some things I would have done differently. I would have been patient in the initial phase of selecting participants for interviews and waited until the third interviewee had emerged. The two that emerged through the process

described in the methods chapter provided interviews rooted in an important relationship between them and me. The third participant did not engage fully in the emotional intensity of the experience and the consequent data felt luke warm and not inspiring to me.

I would have also kept a keener eye on my own process after the self-chapter was finished. To a certain extent I kept myself a little distanced in the write up experience apart from the self chapter. Although, I do not want to be too harsh on myself as I know there was some self-protection in my behaviour.

I would have liked to have interviewed someone from a vastly different culture, such as a Kenyan person, with tribal and national identity. Not because it would say so much about that culture but just to get a flavour of what it is to be Kenyan and to mourn. My conversations with Kenyans revealed interesting facts about burial and the importance of family land when death happens in a tribe. I am well aware that there are probably greater differences between Kenyan tribes than there is between Kenyans and British people experiencing loss. What it would have shown is the importance of really listening to others when experiencing loss and not assuming that what is usual to the listener is usual to the speaker.

I would also like to have read more of the wonderful literature that is available and have the feeling that more reading in the sociological and anthropological disciplines would yield a rich harvest in this subject.

I would have liked to have learnt what I have learnt about loss without losing my two dear brothers, my father and my marriage. Unfortunately, the experience of loss that I have been through has taught me more than second hand accounts and I know that without such experience I would not be doing the work I do or writing about loss in such a way. I have spent the last 14 years of my life working and researching and teaching about loss. When in the early days of my own therapy the therapist suggested that such loss in life could bring me richness and knowledge to be with others I answered her by saying that the price had been too high. In my fifty-first year I can now accept my ambivalence. My losses have made me richer, more aware, and more sensitive to others and the price has been high. Wilber (1979) speaks of the relationship between pleasure and pain and in this quote I gain understanding of attachment and loss.

*'... .. I am never aware of pleasure except in relation to pain. I might indeed be feeling very comfortable and pleasurable at the moment, but I would never be able to realize that were it not for the background existence of discomfort and pain. This is why pleasure and pain always seem to alternate, for it is only in their mutual contrast and alternation that the existence of each can be recognised. Thus, as much as I like the one and loathe the other, the attempt to isolate them is futile. As Whitehead would say, pleasure and pain are just the inseparable crest and trough of a single wave of awareness, and to try to accentuate the positive crest and eliminate the negative trough is to try to eliminate the entire wave of awareness itself.'* (Wilber, 1979, p.24)

On reflection, attachment and loss are just the inseparable crest and trough of a single wave of awareness, and to try to accentuate the positive attachment and eliminate the negative loss is to try to eliminate the wave of awareness itself, of what it is to love.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

*'Chaos theory tells us that simple laws can have very complicated- indeed unpredictable- consequences. Simple causes can produce complex effects.*

*Complexity theory tells us the opposite: Complex causes can produce simple effects.*

*And conventional reductionist science tells us that inside the great simplicities of the universe we find not simplicity but overwhelming complexity.'* (P.2 Cohen & Stewart, 1995)

In considering the question, *what do people do when experiencing loss?* And the follow up question, *And is what they do helpful?* I am conscious of my knowledge of theories and models of bereavement from the traditional medical and psychological literature as seeking to reduce the experience of loss into simple models. This maybe has something to do with the way human beings function in the world. We would have difficulty in functioning in our daily lives unless we experience the world as a simple place. Grappling with complexities in terms of lower level simplicities is one way of creating order. Cohen & Stewart (1995) have coined the word *simplicity* to describe the tendency of simple rules to emerge from underlying disorder and complexity. I suggest that simplicity is a useful concept to understand how such understandings of bereavement have emerged. In this final chapter I would like to suggest, as an outcome from this study that greater simplicity might be useful.

### Finding a simplex model

When I first started to gather the data I was of the view that reducing the process of the experience of loss was not acknowledging its complexities. Now, having gathered the data and considered the results I am of the view that the existing models are all valuable and each say something important about what it is to do *grief work*.

However, if what we want is an all embracing multifaceted model then perhaps we could make good use of van Gennep's (1908, 1960 trans.) schema. All existing theory and models would be accommodated within it and it would also enable other approaches emerging from the sociological and anthropological literature to be contained within it too. It is about as simple as it gets and yet it can offer great opportunity to explore the complexities of human experience. My own discoveries in this study could be comfortably held in the Three part schema of separation, a world of betwixt and between (liminal) and a new world, van Gennep (1908, 1960 trans.) struggled for ten years to put together this schema he called *The Rites de Passage*. It came to him as an *illumination* in the way Moustakas (1990) describes in heuristic research method. We use the term *rite of passage* in a popular language way to describe the movement from one time of life to another in an everyday way. I believe that such a model can be non-judgemental and accepting of all manner of ways in which people experience the movement from separation into a new world, leaving behind the old world and those we loved who lived with us there. There would be no hint of health or pathology, or time limits or the appropriateness of mourning behaviour within such a schema, unless we chose to put it there.

Within this simple structure I could arrange my gained understanding of what it is that people do when experiencing loss. There would be the person moving through the

process with all the intrapersonal aspects of grief so brilliantly observed by John Bowlby in his seminal work co-authored with Robinson (1952) on attachment and loss. In addition there would be room for the psycho-social dimension of the experience and other cognitive stress and coping mechanisms that are brought into play. In addition I would add that choosing to loiter on the threshold and remain in the world of betwixt and between could be seen not as complicated or pathological but as what some people need to do before they can move on. In this world of betwixt and between we find the helpers of this world, the liminal figures with arms outstretched lest those who choose to loiter should fall. For on the threshold are dangers, despair that can become so unbearable that we may not choose to continue living, weariness with accompanying sadness and depression, physical effects of grief that has become long and arduous and many other human struggles. The liminal figures, the helpers may be non-professionals. They may be angels that touch us in our deepest despair and need. Or, they maybe counsellors and therapists there to offer a relationship (Rogers, 1951), the kind of relationship that will help us to take the steps we need to reach the new world.

*'Recall that a person's sense of direction forward is beclouded and obscured during liminality; life's pathway's to the future appear to be unmarked and even uncharted, and the future itself seems unimaginable in every conceivable direction. Behind is the period of destructuring and separation: of general breakdown in persona and identity, in consciously held and affirmed value priorities, in self-images, dreams for the future, and ideals. These have been put away, and the release of the soul that was housed in them opens the gate into an era of psychological 'floating'. Now the way is unfamiliar and ambiguous: collective values, the ideals of youth, old habits do not*

*guide anymore, and there is anxious uncertainty about which direction to take. A person seems to stand perpetually at some inner crossroads, confused and torn. The psychological functions and the attitude that have been guides in the past are faded voices, and when consulted do not seem able to persuade very convincingly anymore.* ' ( Stein, 1983, p.86)

Stein (1983) suggests that we look to Hermes the Greek god of wanderers and of souls in passage to assist during movement through liminality. I suggest that the protective aspect of the work of the therapist is performed under the auspices of Hermes. Later in his chapter entitled *On the Road of Life*, (p.130) he suggests that when two people are on the road, either in a literal sense or in a metaphorical sense and meet, then they will experience the presence of Hermes. This results in an unusually intense atmosphere of intimacy, created in a sudden manner. Unfinished thoughts and subtle gesture take them deeper and pull them closer. The potential for deep intimate sharing when inhabiting a liminal world on life's journey is strong. Otherwise unbridgeable distances can be surmounted, such as, social class, age, geographical place of origin, educational level or psychological type. The potential for unconventional relationships is ripe.

*'And is it not one of our most persistent hopes and fantasies to find, somewhere out there on the road, a fellow journeyer and soul companion? It must be that we are unconsciously looking for Hermes, for the communion this archetype brings us when we are together in the liminality of the road'*. (Stein, 1983, p.131)



The role of the archetype Hermes, also god of transference can be seen to include the therapist as liminal figure. We offer what we can to weary travellers. Within van Gennep's schema (1908, 1960 trans.) the counsellor arrives at a time of great intensity of feeling after a separation experience and the capacity to develop a relationship of deep significance and intimacy is possible. For in this world of great confusion and grief is the potential for rebirth and new life for the client.

Journeymen or floaters do feel a sense of unreality (Stein, 1983) they may even feel ghostlike to themselves. They can sometimes vanish from stability and close friends and disappear into thin air. There can be a disappearing emotionally, avoidance of social commitments and obligations, much ducking, drifting and hiding. Also says Stein (1983) it is in journeying that there exists *the best condition for loving*. There can be extraordinary love affairs and venturing into unknown, inaccessible or forbidden psychological regions. In the betwixt and between liminal world of grief we become aware of the world in a different way.

*'Every object and person in it is a soul figure and calls forth careful psychological scrutiny; each item evokes a sense of importance and symbolic significance far beyond what is calculated by persons who only live in the faded (persona) world of road signs, taxes and pragmatic coping strategies'.* (Stein, 1983, p.137)

In simplicity we see held a simple movement through a simple structure and yet the complexity is evident in our capacity to become in touch with turmoil, fluctuations, and dawning awareness of the new life ahead, that will include what has been left out and excluded from the old world before the separation happened. Some awareness

that has occurred during the liminal phase becomes known as the new period of stability and consolidation is reached. Life after loss can become a journey with soul. The idea that crisis can lead to the stars as well as to the grave.

Considering loss within this wider world of Greek mythology, Jungian archetypes and states of liminality allow the results from this study to slip comfortably into a model that can afford counsellors an alternative way of seeing the experience of loss.

### **Original findings and Conclusions drawn**

In this section I offer some tentative conclusions from the findings.

The outcomes of this study offer some original findings. Firstly, there is the idea that each of us has a *grieving self*. This is the part of a fluid, ever changing self that is always grieving. It grows with accumulated loss experience and also develops as we find ways to manage our losses in life and move into new life spaces. The person seems to recognise this aspect of his or herself and when asked about loss in general will narrate a life in which many losses have been experienced and relate them to each other. In respect of current studies this finding fits within a pluralistic view of the self as a universal subpersonality (Rowan, 1999) However, when examining the whole definition and full characteristics of the grieving self the relational dialogical model of the self (Shotter, 1999) appears to offer a more suitable home for it. Although the literature on early development and trauma suggesting layers of loss experience possibly located within a subpersonality is very convincing and has a ring of truth about it. I feel it is congruent with tacit knowledge I have.

Secondly, loss experience is found to be located in interaction. In addition to being an intrapersonal experience it is an interpersonal experience too. It appears to be located in relationships, places and spaces and in objects. The dynamics of relationships, interaction with place, space and objects appear to provide locations for grief work to happen in all its various rich and ingenious forms. This second finding suggests that a dialogical self concept from a post modern perspective could explain grief work as informing our grieving behaviour by a process of dialogically structured polyvocal understandings. (Shotter, 1999) I am drawn to this post-modern understanding of human behaviour and feel that it incorporates all of the findings from this study comfortably, including the idea of a grieving self being located as fluid, without a skin boundary, located in a timeless dimension of an ever changing self.

Thirdly I have identified a model into which all bereavement theories could be comfortably accommodated. It is van Gennep's (1908, 1960 trans.) anthropological three part schema model of change as a rite of passage. It offers a simple model into which all loss can be understood. The role of the counsellor in such a model is to be an inhabitant of the liminal world of the other, the world of *betwixt and between* when the old life has passed and the new yet to be experienced. As the grieving teeter on the threshold of a new life in a new world, a world that does not include what has been lost, the counsellor can offer a therapeutic relationship characterised by acceptance, empathy and genuineness (Rogers, 1957) In this liminal world the grieving have agency and find unique ways to work on grief either as a functional grieving subpersonality (Rowan, 1999) or seen from a post modern approach, as a dialogical self (Shotter, 1999) The former accepting the internal view of the psyche and the

latter one step away seeing self plurality as emerging not from within but from between, in dialogue (Shotter, 1999)

Fourthly, Csikszentminaly & Halton (1981) make the point that researchers have neglected a full investigation of the relationship between people and objects. The findings of this study indicate that the world of objects and the relationship of the grieving to objects are hugely important in the process of loss and consequent healing. Current bereavement theories pay scant attention to the relationships between people and objects outside of a pathological view of hanging on to objects in a 'morbid' way after a loss. The findings of this study indicate that the relationships that people have with objects can be locations for the healing process after loss.

Fifthly, the role of spirituality and spiritual sensitivity as part of the experience of loss has been highlighted in this study as a common experience among the grieving. The practice of counselling gives respectful approaches to this aspect of people's lives. The bereavement theories that are currently accepted tend to pathologize spiritual sightings and sensations of spiritual presence after a death. The findings indicate that these experiences are non- pathological and commonly experienced.

Overall the findings from this study lead me to conclude that current theories of bereavement do not acknowledge the wisdom and agency of the mourner. They are expert led theories and suggest that there is a right way to grieve. In addition it is thought to be pathological not to accept pain and express it. The conclusions that I have tentatively drawn suggest that people find many different ways to process loss and what is more it is they and only they who know the right way for them to mourn

their losses. If professionals and academics in the bereavement field were able to let go of knowledge and power positions and accept that loss reactions and mourning processes are idiosyncratic then mourners would begin to hear their own voices and realise that it is within their own power to know best how to work through grief.

The conclusions, though tentative, suggest a much broader definition of what it is to do grief work, than the current literature suggests. It is much more than psychological internal adjustment through expression of pain and acceptance of the loss (Worden, 1983, 1991). The experience of loss and consequent grief work is intrapersonal, social, cultural and spiritual, happening through interaction in our everyday experiences. It appears that when we are taking part in restorative activity, during a loss experience we may still be doing grief work. This challenges prevailing theory (Stroebe et al, 2001) advocating the idea of grief as 'coping' in the dual process model in which periods of grief work alternate with periods of restoration activity in which grief work is not happening.

### **My own publications in the field of loss**

I have published some work in this area. The list below gives some flavour of what is already in the public domain from my thinking and research.

### **Publications in print**

1. Playing Through Grief: Respecting the Wisdom of a Young Child, K.F. Hunt, in *CHANGE: Transformations in Education*, vol. 3(2) pp.81-93 2000
2. Grief: A Complex, Unique and Rich Experience, J. Ingram, K.F. Hunt & M.

Robson, in *Changes*, Vol. 18 number 2 pp. 69-82 Summer, 2000

3. *Suicidal Bereavement*, K. F. Hunt, presented at the 1993 University of Durham International Counselling Conference and published in '*Counselling in the Workplace: Selected Papers*', K. Hunt and M.A. Robson (Eds.), School of Education, University of Durham, 1993.

### Conference Publications

1. *Suicidal Bereavement*, presented at American Association for Counselling Bilateral Conference, Edinburgh, UK July, 1992
2. *Suicidal Bereavement*, presented for International Round Table for the Advancement of counselling (IRTAC) and the New Zealand Counselling Association Conference, Auckland, New Zealand, August 1993.
3. *Suicidal Bereavement*, Invited workshop at British Association for Counselling Annual Conference, Cardiff, UK, Sept. 1993.
4. *Where is Grief Located?* Accepted for presentation at 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Counselling Research Conference, BAC, Birmingham, UK 1996.
5. *Where is Grief Located?* Presented at the Fifth Annual International Counselling Conference, Centre for Studies in Counselling (CESCO) School of Education, University of Durham, 1997.

6. *Children and Grieving: A Case Study*, Accepted for the European Association of Counselling (EAC) Fourth Annual Conference, 'Counselling and the Family', Perugia, Italy, October 2nd and 3rd 1997.
7. *Playing with and through the Dark: Children's Experience of Play Therapy*, keynote Address at 7<sup>th</sup> Annual International Counselling Conference, 'Counselling: The darkest Time is Just before Dawn', Centre for Studies in Counselling (CESCO) School of Education, University of Durham, UK, 1999
8. *Accepting the Wisdom of a Child in Grief*, The 3rd International Early years Conference, University of Warwick, UK April 1999.
9. *Mourning in an Early Years Setting* presented at the Realising Potential in the Early Years Conference, Newcastle University, April 1999
10. *"The Grieving Self"*, the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference of the New Zealand Counselling Association, 'A Place to Stand' June 1999.
11. *A Young Child's Loss Experience*, presented to the European Association of Counselling (EAC) 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, 'Counselling as an Evidence-Based Profession, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, November, 1999
12. *The Special Needs of Children Doing Grief Work*, Presented at the 2000 International Association for Counselling Conference, 'Counselling in a

Multi-cultural World for the Millennium, May 2000, Thessaloniki, Greece,

13. *Educational, Counselling and Play Therapy Theories Converge to deepen an Understanding of Childhood Grief*, presented at The International Society for Child and Play Therapy/Play Therapy Ireland/Canadian Play Therapy Institute Year 2000, World Congress on child and Play Therapy, Dublin, Ireland. June 2000,
14. *Play Therapy for Bereaved Children*, presented at Kenya Association for Professional Counsellors (KAPC) 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Counselling Conference, 'On Becoming a Profession', Nairobi, Kenya, Africa, Sept.2001
15. *Collaborative Process Research Project: The Experience of Loss in Childhood*, Paper presented at British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP) 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Counselling Research Conference 'Working Together', London, UK. 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> May 2002
16. *The Healing Power of Play*, presented at the Hawaii International Conference on Social Sciences, Honolulu, HI, USA, June 11<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> 2002
17. *Working Together*, presented at the Kenya Association for Professional Counsellors (KAPC) 3<sup>rd</sup> Counselling Conference, 'The Challenge and Meaning of VCT (Voluntary Counselling & Testing) for Counsellors, Nairobi, Kenya, Africa, September 2002



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19. *How Ethical Decision-Making is Incorporated into the Process of Research in Counselling*, presented at Bradford District care Trust in partnership with the City of Bradford Metropolitan Conference 'Ethical Dilemmas in Practice', Bradford, UK. 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003,
  
20. *Young Men and Suicide*, Presented at the Kenya Association of professional Counsellors (KAPC) 4<sup>th</sup> Counselling Conference, 'Gender Issues in Counselling', Nairobi, Kenya, Africa, September 2003

### **Paper in Preparation**

*Is Brief Training in Play Therapy useful to Professionals Working in the Care and Education of Children in Kenya, Africa?*

My publications in the field of bereavement and counselling and play therapy have afforded me much opportunity to discuss my ideas with many other therapists in many countries and from many different cultures. I believe this has deepened my understanding and contributed to my immersing myself in the data on loss over the

last 12 years of teaching and researching in higher education.

### **Further study and investigation**

In considering the findings of this thesis and future study and investigation I would be interested in looking for resonance within the counselling and play therapy professions in terms of understanding about what it is that people do when experiencing loss and is what they do that is helpful. One way of approaching this would be to design a training course for experienced professionals and invite them to take part in a research project at the same time. Bereavement therapists could be invited to observe and collect data within an action –based research approach. Once awareness is raised in the training then further material rooted in practice could be helpful in furthering understanding and also influencing practice.

An influence on training in national voluntary organisations and other institutions would be a goal to aim for, should resonance be found. To this end a book on the experience of loss could be helpful. This is something I could imagine considering embarking on writing myself in the future.

Working together feels like an important move forward. The gathering together of social scientists, medical people and counsellors and play therapists in a research forum would encourage us to learn from each other. At present I notice that there is little of this although a research dialogue in the journal *Mortality* has begun.

Finally, this last paragraph of a piece of work started in principle some fourteen more years ago feels like a goodbye that is hard to acknowledge. I don't want to stop

thinking, exploring and discovering more about the human experience of loss. The thesis may be complete but the learning will go on. There is a loss to mourn when the last key is tapped and some of that loss has been around for me in the last few weeks. As I have pulled sepia coloured newspaper cuttings from old carrier bags and piled up one book after another, and waded through much paper on the floor I have constructed something. This something is not the whole but as near as I can get to communicating the whole and I offer it with humility and a peace, acknowledging that these pages contain images and reflections of lives, lived with courage and ingenuity at times when we are forced to find our deepest resources and face the rawness of what it is to lose.

### ***That Penknife***

*That penknife lies in the long grass where I lost it  
 But it is closer in my hand for that.  
 This child's tears have rusted it to a powder  
 The dew keeps dark and rain has battered flat;  
 Earth of red oxide; and somewhere a curled, peeling  
 Sliver of bone: the handle. What did I lose?  
 -What went into it. That comes back now, heavily  
 Held, and solid as then. But it hurt like a bruise  
 At the time, and worse than a bruise it wasn't there  
 To be touched and pondered over; till today.  
 There it lay in the grass. I wonder whether  
 It's true what all of us hoped when we used to say*

*To a marble; **Brother** go and find your brother.*

*Does it work? But marbles are common: you can't play*

*Like that with a penknife when you have no other.*

Oliver Bernard (Barker, 1998)

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**Appendix A**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:**

(The participant should complete the whole of this sheet himself/herself)

*Please cross out  
as necessary*

Have you read the Participant Information Sheet? YES / NO

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the study? YES / NO

Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions? YES / NO

Have you received enough information about the study? YES / NO

Who have you spoken to? Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms/Prof. ...Kathryn Hunt.....

Do you consent to participate in the study? YES/NO

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study:

- \* at any time and
- \* without having to give a reason for withdrawing and

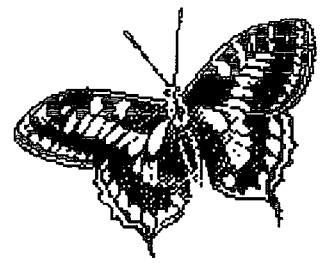
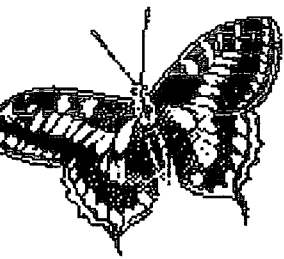
YES / NO

**Signed** ..... **Date** .....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....

**Signature of witness** ..... **Date** .....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....



**Appendix B**

**CRUSE Bereavement Care – Durham Branch and Centre  
for Studies In Counselling  
(CESCO)  
University of Durham**

**‘Playing through Loss’**

**Consent Form**

I/We .....

Consent to our child .....

To take part in play therapy as part of the above project. Sessions will be recorded and these recordings will be the property of CRUSE Bereavement Care – Durham Branch.

Signed.....

Date:.....

Signed.....

Date:.....

**Research**

In order to provide a good service to children it is helpful for us to learn as much as we can about children in therapy. We would like your permission to use the knowledge we gain from working with your child to further this knowledge. We would ensure that any publications or teaching material resulting from this work did not reveal your child’s identity through the use of a false name.

I/We .....

Consent to our child .....

To take part in the research part of the above project.

Signed.....

Date:.....

