

CHAPTER SIX

THE INVESTIGATION AND RESULTS

6.1 The Research Question

The aim of the study is to answer the question: "What is the experience of the loss of a sibling?" In order to obtain the required data, the following research question was posed:

"Would you please describe in as much detail as possible, just as the thoughts and feelings come to you, what you experienced at the loss of your brother/sister. Please focus on your feelings, on what it was like for you at the time of the loss and how you experience the loss now. Please keep in mind that there is no one right or proper way to experience this loss. I am really interested in your experience. You may take as long as you like."

6.2 The Research Participants

A reminder that for purposes of confidentiality and anonymity all the participants have been allocated pseudonyms and all identifying information has been changed or omitted.

1. Participant 1: Cathy Cathy is unmarried.
 Age: 62 years.
 Cathy lost her 19-year-old brother when she was 23 years old.
 Cause of death: Motor vehicle accident.
 Sibling status: Cathy is the second born in a family of 4 children and the only surviving child.
 Previous losses: A 3-year-old sister died during mother's pregnancy with Cathy. Later, when Cathy was two years old, her mother lost another infant (a daughter) shortly after birth. Cathy was unaware of these losses until after her 19-year-old brother's death (the last born).

2. Participant 2: Dia Dia is married and has two children.
 Age: 51 years.
 Dia lost her 25-year-old married sister when she was 21 years old.
 Cause of death: Motor vehicle accident.
 Sibling status: Dia is the younger of 2 children and the only surviving child
 Previous losses: A grandfather and the sister of a very close friend.

3. Participant 3: Elena Elena is unmarried.
 Age: 25 years.
 Elena lost her 25-year-old brother when she was 22 years old.
 Cause of death: Motor-cycle accident.
 Sibling status: Elena is the youngest of 3 children. Her remaining elder
 brother is married and does not live at home.
 Previous losses: maternal grandmother.

6.3. Data Analysis

To be included as follows:

- 6.3.1. Participant 1 : Cathy Table I Natural Meaning Units and Central Themes
 Table II Situated Constituents
 Table III Situated Narrative Description
- 6.3.2. Participant 2 : Dia Table III Situated Narrative Description
- 6.3.3. Participant 3 : Elena Table III Situated Narrative Description

Tables I and II for Dia and Elena appear in the Appendix.

It is perhaps appropriate at this point to remind the reader that the data analysis takes several forms. In this study, all the results are grounded in the narratives or portraits of the participant/subject. Results are most concrete, individualised, particular. That important act of particularising must be balanced and matched by the effort to generalise. To achieve this all the individual portraits are honed into General Psychological Structure, Structural Synthesis and Essential Structure. The words themselves - general, structural, essential - reveal the movement toward the picture that fits the three women volunteers, but also any sibling who mourns a lost brother or sister. Repetition, a regrettable consequence, should not be seen as careless redundancy that the writer was too lazy to eliminate. In point of fact, their presence demanded the most taxing labour of the write-up.

TABLE I

Participant 1: Cathy

| NATURAL MEANING UNITS | CENTRAL THEMES |
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| 1. It feels like it just happened yesterday. | 1. Although it has been 39 years since her brother's death, on talking about the loss, Cathy feels as though it has just happened. |
| 2. Right I was in J. when it happened, when my brother had the accident, and I was watching a movie and they blackened the ... the ... [theatre] and they put a notice to come to the Manager's office and there was this absolute fear ... you know, that ... um ... I didn't know ... my mom and dad were in D and we'd gone over to J to see the movie by train ... and how would I get ... you know ... what was going on ... and here I am in J. and away from home and there was this absolute disbelief, you know, you can't think. Anyway, eventually I got to the office and the Manager told me that my brother had a bad accident and that friends were coming to pick me up. | 2. Cathy and her brother were away from home and from their parents when the accident occurred and her immediate feelings on receiving the news that something had happened to her brother were of absolute fear, aloneness, confusion and utter disbelief, which blocked out all thought. |
| 3. And ... the... the... the knowing that it's very serious and ... the hoping that it ... nothing was going to be as bad as ... you know ... I thought it ... And then they dropped me at the hospital and I ... I can't remember if I went in to my brother ... as I said, I run away. They brought a cushion that I sat on and I don't think that I ... still wanted to accept ... the doctor came and told me there was nothing they could do. He had damaged his liver but I <i>still</i> ... you know ... and I sort of half-slept on this couch ... | 3. Although there was an awareness of the seriousness of her brother's condition, Cathy could not accept this reality and continued to hope that it was not as bad as she thought. She realises that she is inclined to avoid painful feelings and she withdrew, unable even to recall seeing her brother. |
| 4. ... and eventually my mom and dad travelled | 4. Once her parents arrived at the hospital, |

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| <p>up from D and they arrived at the hospital and ... I don't even know what time, you know, and ... from that moment everything became sort of hazy. Ja, ja, it is as though the reality of what happened makes you, made me, feel totally ... um ... out of touch, you know, as though you ... as I say, I run ... as though you don't want to accept what has happened.</p> | <p>everything became 'hazy' and Cathy felt completely out of touch, not wanting to accept the reality of what had happened.</p> |
| <p>5. My mother, strangely enough, she came out and told me ... she came out and told me we must go home and then ... (wept bitterly/very upset) ... we went home ... Anyway, at some stage ... I think it must have been about 9 o'clock she came and said we've got to go to the hospital. So we quickly got dressed ...</p> | <p>5. Cathy was surprised that her mother initially responded in such a practical and matter-of-fact way, and she is overcome with emotion as she recalls her mother saying that they must go home. Later that evening they were summoned to the hospital.</p> |
| <p>6. They went in. I sat outside ...Mm. ... (struggling with tears) and he died while my mom and dad were in the room (weeping bitterly) ... and my mother became hysterical ...</p> | <p>6. At the hospital her parents went in to her brother while Cathy waited outside and she weeps bitterly as she relives the painful moment of her brother's death and her mother's uncontrolled expression of intense grief.</p> |
| <p>7. Then they came back and we went home ... What happened after that ... the going home ... I was like so cold, I can remember that.</p> | <p>7. Cathy recalls the journey home and remembers clearly that she felt extremely cold.</p> |
| <p>8. And there was much phoning and people coming and ... I can't remember ... anyone really coming up to me and saying: "We're so sad", you know (wept). And I don't know if it was because I withdrew or because, you know, they... the ... the ... it was my mom and dad that lost their child, you know,</p> | <p>8. Although many people called and visited the family, nobody offered Cathy their condolences and she was not sure if this was because she withdrew or because people were more aware that her parents had lost their child.</p> |
| <p>9. Ja and even at the funeral I can remember ... after the funeral ... it was a strange thing, you know. It was as though it was something</p> | <p>9. Even at the funeral and afterwards, Cathy was powerfully aware of her parents' incredible pain and felt strangely apart</p> |

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| <p>that happened that was not part and parcel of me, you know. It was something that I was observing. Do you understand? It was <i>terrific</i> pain that my mum and dad had and I was observing all of this.</p> | <p>from what had happened; like a spectator observing her parents' intense sorrow.</p> |
| <p>10. ... and also no one really owned that I was part of the family. With the result that you think you are a bit of an outsider ... it is ... that it is those people that are pained and are so ... in sorrow, not you, and I think it becomes ... uh ... uh ... something that you ... you ... well up inside... because you don't really give yourself ... you don't really think you have the right to ... to be, you know, to be emotional about it because it is <i>their</i> son and it's <i>only</i> your brother. Do you understand what I am saying?</p> | <p>10. Cathy's sense of being outside the experience was strengthened by the fact that no one acknowledged that she was part of the grieving family. She felt like a stranger who did not own the pain and realises that she could not give herself permission to grieve, feeling that it was her parents' loss and pain, not hers. They had lost a child and he was <i>only</i> her brother.</p> |
| <p>11. With the result..... it was a very strange.... it still feels to me as though it's totally hazed up, you know those few weeks of it.</p> | <p>11. With the sense that she was not part of the grief, the loss assumed a surreal quality and she realises that the events immediately following her brother's death are still completely obscure.</p> |
| <p>12. I can remember someone. We were sitting in the ... the ... the ... I had a bedroom/ sitting-room and I was sitting there with some of my cousins and a person came in and said to me ... I can't remember the person, but I can remember the person saying to me, "I'm so sorry for you ... for losing your brother". And I think that's the only person..... (weeping bitterly).</p> | <p>12. Cathy recalls very clearly and with pain that only one person commiserated with her over the loss of her brother.</p> |
| <p>13 ... and you know when your [research] question(naire) came and I looked at it and I couldn't answer it, I couldn't put it on paper because it becomes such a reality ... on paper.</p> | <p>13. Cathy was unable to give a written description of her loss experience and she realises that, to this day, it remains difficult for her to confront the reality of her brother's death.</p> |

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| <p>14. And ... but this has also given me time to think a bit exactly what actually happened, you know. How did I feel about all this and as I say, I felt like an outsider... Ja, sitting outside the whole thing but being very torn as well. And very upset.</p> | <p>14. Having time to reflect on her loss, Cathy recognises the ambiguity of her experience and realises that while she felt like an outsider, she also felt torn and deeply hurt.</p> |
| <p>15. I think when there is a tragedy like this each one copes with his own pain. You can't cope with your mother's pain, you can't cope with your father's. As much as you would like to, you know</p> | <p>15. Much as she wanted to alleviate her parents' suffering, Cathy felt helpless to do so and she realises that with such a tragedy each one in the family copes alone with his/her own pain.</p> |
| <p>16. I can remember going to bed and waking up in the morning and thinking it definitely didn't happen, you know. He is here, you know.</p> | <p>16. Cathy could not believe that her brother had died and recalls waking up with the conviction that his death had not happened, that he was still alive.</p> |
| <p>17. Ja, and then when the funeral was over and we tried to get back into normal life ... um ... I became ... I tried to protect them from songs that he was very fond of, you know.</p> | <p>17. Once the funeral was over and the family tried to return to "normal" life, Cathy attempted to shield her parents from familiar associations with her brother.</p> |
| <p>18. ... and it became a weird existence because he was so much part and parcel of our lives yet none of us acknowledged him, we never spoke about him. You know ... he ... everyday ... I mean we'd sit down to eat and we would all cry and no one would acknowledge why we were crying.</p> | <p>18. Although her brother's "presence" was palpable, no one ever mentioned him and a weird family existence ensued: they would all cry at mealtimes but no one acknowledged that they were grieving the loss.</p> |
| <p>19. I just remember once my mother said to us at the table, to my dad and I, um ... that we must just think what it would have been [like]... if <i>he</i> had killed someone ... because a drunk man rode into him. Ja, and it sort of ... it's a burden that at least ... he did not have to bear. And I think that was the only time that there was ever an acknowledgement about the ... about what had happened.</p> | <p>19. Cathy recalls only one occasion on which her mother spoke about the circumstances of her brother's death (accident with drunken driver), saying that if the situation had been reversed her brother would have had to bear the burden of having killed someone.</p> |

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| <p>20. My mother on occasion became hysterical and my dad got the doctor in a few times ...</p> | <p>20. Cathy was aware of the intensity of her mother's grief, which could not always be contained, and her father had to summon the doctor on several occasions.</p> |
| <p>21. I ... what was I doing? I can't remember ... it really was a terribly hazy ... a time that I seldom go back and look into.</p> | <p>21. Cathy has only vague memories of what she was doing at the time of the death and realises that this was a confusing period in her life, one which she seldom revisits or reflects on.</p> |
| <p>22. I know I was at home and I stayed at home. I made a pact that I would stay with them for 3 years ... and I stayed for 3 years and tried to protect them.</p> | <p>22. Cathy has a clear memory of living at home and of resolving to stay with her parents for a specified period (3 years) in an attempt to protect them.</p> |
| <p>23. Then they started to go to the cemetery every Sunday. And it became an absolute ritual. They'd both go off. Sometimes I'd go with ... eventually I couldn't stand the emotional strain and they'd go and they'd come back. My father was losing weight, my mother was looking terrible and one day they came back and I said to my mother "This has got to stop! You're killing dad ... you're um ... you've got other things that you must look....."</p> | <p>23. Going to the cemetery, an absolute ritual for her parents, was emotionally very stressful for Cathy. She was acutely aware of her parents' emotional and physical deterioration and at one point confronted her mother angrily with the fear that this was destroying her father.</p> |
| <p>24. ... and she said: "I just want to tell you my favourite child died!" (very emotional/wept) ... You know when ... when you're in a situation you don't realise that's just her way of hitting back, you know ... at her pain ...I think that it was devastating..... it wasn't.....it was hurtful... it was..... When I think about it..... for many years I thought I had no worth.</p> | <p>24. Her mother's retaliation that she had lost her <i>favourite</i> child devastated and hurt Cathy deeply and for many years she felt worthless, not realising at the time that this was her mother's way of lashing out against the pain of her loss.</p> |
| <p>25. You see, you yourself are in ... I myself was feeling terribly ... I was scared for what was happening to them seeing them, you</p> | <p>25. Cathy was frightened and confused as she witnessed her parents' relentless grief and their deterioration, but, while the</p> |

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| <p>know, seeing them deteriorating. I couldn't understand what was going on, because it just continued and continued and the strange thing is that after that they came right, you know. I mean they still didn't mention him , they never mentioned him, neither did my father ... um ...</p> | <p>confrontation somehow served as a force-for-change and her parents improved, they still never spoke about her brother.</p> |
| <p>26. And just before my father died my mother and I sat in the lounge and I spoke about him and she cried and from then we spoke about him ... that was 15 years after he died. Um ... we have never mentioned the circumstances ... um ...</p> | <p>26. It was many years (15 years) after the death, just before her father died, that Cathy finally broke the silence and spoke to her mother about her brother. Thereafter they were able to talk about him, but they have never discussed the circumstances of his death.</p> |
| <p>27. ... in D they bought him a little car and the car arrived as the funeral car arrived to take him. Ja, you know it was a very, very um ... um ... emotional thing and to this day I cannot look at blue M....s. They bought him a little blue M... there and as we were getting into the funeral car the driver with the blue M.... came from D and</p> | <p>27. An extremely emotional moment for Cathy was the delivery of her brother's new car that arrived just as the hearse arrived to take his body and, to this day, she avoids this painful reminder (car) of his death.</p> |
| <p>28. ... he was driving my mother's car. There was a lot of guilt I had in that as well because the evening that we went out he was going to go to his girl friend by bus and I said "No" and I got quite angry. "We've got to go to the station and you've got to take us" and because he took the car he had the accident and <i>that</i> caused me guilt for years ...</p> | <p>28. For many years Cathy experienced much guilt and felt responsible for her brother's death because, on that fateful evening, she had insisted that he drive her to her destination (the station) and she felt that because he used the car he had the accident.</p> |
| <p>29. That I worked through ... and, I mean, I never told my parents so I haven't worked through that to that extent , you know. I think to a certain extent there is still a lot of</p> | <p>29. Cathy believes that she has worked through her guilt but realises that she still blames herself for what happened that night as she has never discussed this with her parents.</p> |

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| <p>guilt wrapped up in him having been in the car ... um....</p> | |
| <p>30. ... But I think you've got to let go as well, you know, can't live ... As I had to eventually let go of you know ... I knew my brother was my mother's favourite child, you know, she was very protective of him. He was very much like her family and he'd had a car accident before that and was in hospital for ... um ... [She worried more about] ... about him than she did about me. Yes.</p> | <p>30. Cathy realises that in order to move on with her life she has to let go of the guilt just as she eventually let go of the hurt of knowing that her brother was her mother's special child.</p> |
| <p>31. She used me in many ways, I think. She was a very hard woman, I think ... I didn't realise at that stage that she had had so many ... ja! (losses) Ja, and she was very, very hard on me. My dad also always said that "just keep quiet you keep the peace", but when I was a child I didn't understand this. And the fact that she was pregnant with me when it happened to my sister then it's resentment towards me ... on her part ... that's how I worked it out, you know, and I think it made it easier for me to cope with what happened when I was young ... You know, as I ... you know ... it actually was a very strange relationship, my mom and I. Now that she...she's 90 now, she's mellowed tremendously yet she was always very, very hard on me, she ... never on my brother ... it was a strange thing ...</p> | <p>31. In the relationship with her mother, Cathy felt her alienating resentment and experienced her mother as very hard on her, never on her brother. As a child this confused her, but later when she realised that her mother had suffered other losses, she was able to make sense of her mother's resentment, and of her father's protectiveness towards her mother, and this made it easier to cope with.</p> |
| <p>32. but I don't think you can ... you know, you must worry, 'why?'. No ... I just ... lately I just thought, well that was the way it was and you just got to accept and just get on with it. As I say her ... <i>her</i> bereavement</p> | <p>32. Although Cathy remains acutely aware that her mother's unresolved grief over previous losses had a profound impact on her self-confidence, she believes that searching for reasons for her mother's behaviour is futile,</p> |

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| <p>which I was not part and parcel of had a tremendous effect on <i>my</i> confidence</p> | <p>and she has recently decided that she must accept what was existentially there and move on with her life.</p> |
| <p>33. ... and going back to how I feel about ... I still think ... I still grieve about him ... as he was when he died ... a young man, you know, and he was a very good-looking young man. I don't know how I feel now ... um</p> | <p>33. Cathy still grieves over her brother and remembers him as the attractive young man that he was when he died. She remains frozen in the past and is uncertain about the meaning of her loss in the present.</p> |
| <p>34. ... Every morning, you know, you wake up and think it couldn't have, you know, he must be here. That not wanting to accept it. Ja, I actually don't know when acceptance came. I think for a long time after he died I'd wake up and think he's still ... and I'd hear him whistle. He loved um ... um ... um ... motorbikes ... not motorbike(s) ... bicycle(s) ... um ... he'd go on these bicycles ... racing bicycles, in groups with the other chaps and um ... it um ... you know, there are still certain sounds that one still remembers.</p> | <p>34. Cathy could not accept her brother's death and is unsure when acceptance came, but she recognises that for a long time after he died she would wake up and think that he was still alive; she would hear the familiar sounds that she associated with him and that she remembers so clearly to this day.</p> |
| <p>35. ...I don't think you can ... like my father died and you don't lose [the memories]... sometimes it dims and then other times the things that you can't remember you remember very well again, you know. I think it depends on the normal mental state or your emotional state perhaps. You want to remember and what you don't, you don't. And ...um ... and ... Ja, ja they... they ... I can still remember that feeling of waking up and thinking it didn't ... it didn't happen ... that it was a dream ... you know, and not wanting to accept ...</p> | <p>35. Cathy realises that one does not lose the memories of a significant other but that one vacillates between remembering and forgetting, depending on one's emotional state and whether one wants to remember or not. She recognises this dialectic in her feeling of not wanting to accept the reality of her brother's death and in her firm belief, on waking up, that what had happened was nothing more than a dream.</p> |
| <p>36. [the reality] You know, I don't know. I</p> | <p>36. The suddenness of her brother's death made</p> |

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| <p>think it took time ... even the ... I think they left the coffin open in the church. I think it was done purposely so that the reality could hit us. You know when someone is ill and ... when my father died he was ill for some time ... and ... and ... Ja, that prepares you, but when ... and I think ... there it hit ... home. That ... here he was ... and I think that is why it was done. I don't know who decided that it should be. Perhaps the family did, you know, my mother's sisters ... and ... saw that the acceptance wasn't, you know, there. I don't know but normally all funerals we went to the coffins are closed and I think perhaps the reality hit there ... that it's over. But still ... I can still remember long after the funeral waking up and thinking it definitely didn't happen, you know, that he's here ... and then listening for the noises he used to make in the morning ...</p> | <p>acceptance very difficult and, while the reality that it was over did strike Cathy when she saw her brother's body lying in the open coffin, full realisation of this reality came over time and she can still remember, long after the funeral, waking and thinking that it did not happen and listening for the sounds that her brother used to make.</p> |
| <p>37. It's a ... bereavement is a strange thing ... it's ... you can't picture the moment ... I think each one ... and I often wonder in small children what happens there Ja, ja there isn't that ... that (understanding) ... that's very interesting isn't it? I think the pain of the whole situation that it's a closed thing, there's no longer that person, you don't want to accept and you actually ... in ... you look ahead at the pain that is lying ahead, do you understand, and that not wanting to accept ... that you think it hasn't happened.....it couldn't have happened, so that you don't have to go</p> | <p>37. Cathy recognises that grief is not a moment in time that can be captured and contained in the present. She expresses concern for young children who do not understand what is happening but paradoxically realises that for her the conflict between acceptance and non-acceptance arose through the painful awareness that death was final, of looking towards a future without her brother and wanting to avoid experiencing all the pain again.</p> |

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| through all that | |
| <p>38. ... the strange thing as well that I thought ... I've often thought about it. It never came up in my mind that why did God do this? Ja, you know it ... I never ... perhaps I was blaming myself more than God ...</p> | <p>38. Cathy finds it strange that in her search to understand the loss, it never occurred to her to blame God for what had happened and, on reflection, she realises that perhaps she held herself more responsible for the loss.</p> |
| <p>39. You know it is like a whirlpool of all kinds of things ... and ... after, after it sort of happened little things would come up, you know, they'd surface a bit and then they'd vanish in the water again, that type of thing, and one's ability to cope later when they appear a little longer, you know, and before you suppress it again and hide whatever you're feeling..... You can deal with it a little bit and then off it goes again ... you close it up ... it um ...</p> | <p>39. For Cathy, bereavement was like a whirlpool with different emotions surfacing and then vanishing again only to reappear for a slightly longer period at a later stage, challenging her ability to cope with more before she suppressed and concealed whatever she was feeling. She realises that she could deal with the feelings for only a short time before closing them up again.</p> |
| <p>40. ... and I often wonder ... perhaps it is because I am inclined to run ... from emotional ... in anything you know, on T.V, you know ... I switch ... and as a child I used to cry in movies that other people never cried And I think that when you're like that you try and escape and I think that feeling was always with me. I can remember after 3 years I went to teach at X (School) and I never ... I ... thought perhaps I would escape it. I never had that feeling, you know, I just knew I was going. I took everything that was at home with me. The thought of getting away from it never entered my mind. I just knew that for my health and for my <i>emotional</i> survival I had to get away from home ... and at this stage I was 25, 26 ... I went to X (School) ... Yes, it all went with me. It was like I packed it in</p> | <p>40. Although Cathy is aware of her tendency to avoid painful situations, she never considered the possibility of escaping the pain of her loss when she finally left home (after 3 years). While she was aware that for her physical and emotional wellbeing she simply had to get away from home, she could not escape the pain of the loss and all the emotions went with her as though she had packed them in her suitcase.</p> |

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| the suitcase..... The emotions, the ... | |
| <p>41. I also have a little parcel of his with ... with his watch, and ... but I've never opened it. It's still there, it's still closed I move with it wherever I go and ... and ... you know ... as I say, <i>running ... running ...</i></p> | <p>41. Cathy acknowledges that she has a parcel containing some of her brother's belongings that travels with her wherever she goes but which remains unopened. She is aware that she is still trying to evade the pain of the loss.</p> |
| <p>42. You know I don't even know when he died, isn't it terrible?. It's a strange ... as you said, or as I said, it's not accepted ... the reality. Perhaps ... I mean I used to go, even after my dad died, my mother and I used to go to the cemetery and we'd put flowers on my brother's grave, on my dad's grave and my little sister's grave, the one that died. I mean I must have looked at the grave stone a thousand times and cleaned it and I still don't know when he died ... I think ...</p> | <p>42. Cathy feels very distressed that she cannot remember when her brother died even though she has seen his gravestone "a thousand times". She believes that this "not knowing" is part of not wanting to accept the reality of his death.</p> |
| <p>43. ... And yet he was much younger than I was. We were never ... just about a year before he died we started becoming friends ... He was also younger ... and ... on ... on looking back, we had very little in common. We did very little together. I was always the older one, I was always playing the piano and he had other things. He was ...</p> | <p>43. While the loss had a tremendous impact on her, Cathy acknowledges that she and her brother had never shared many interests or activities and that they only started becoming friends about a year before he died.</p> |
| <p>44. ... he also had a friend who shot himself when he was at High School ... life is so ... whew! ... He was at boarding school, my brother, and we didn't tell him ... my mother didn't tell him, and when he came back my mother told him. He was then also in Std 6. And he just turned round and he walked out. Strange that no one ever asked him ... how he felt. We were never asked</p> | <p>44. Through recalling an incident where her brother suffered the traumatic loss of a friend and where nobody in the family discussed the death with him, Cathy realises that even before her brother's loss, her parents never spoke about feelings or asked them how they felt.</p> |

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| <p>you know ... it was ... a ... a ... I don't think my dad ever spoke to him ... or my mother ... about it ... he ... I can't even remember my mother telling him why we thought he did it.</p> | |
| <p>45. As I say, I think on looking back, bereavement counselling would have helped a lot, you know. But now even you doing your PhD on this I've often thought, "I wonder how parents would take to a child going for counselling". You know it's also still very much a new area, this counselling thing . They <i>counsel</i> children that have emotional problems but they don't regard <i>a loss</i> as a counselling problem. You know, I see this at school as well you know there are two little ... one little girl and ... both parents were killed in a helicopter accident, and I said to the school the other day, she's now gone to P : "Is she receiving counselling?", and they said no they don't think so. And I looked and I thought ... to me it's become such an important ... you know ... after having gone to Lifeline and realising what it <i>did</i> do and I think if people become more aware of counselling and, as you are working on, for children as well. Children need help because it is very traumatic, you know</p> | <p>45. Reflecting on her own loss experience, Cathy realises how traumatic loss can be, and she has become very aware of the needs of children and of the importance of bereavement counselling for children as well as for adults. Having experienced the benefits of counselling herself, Cathy feels that parents and others should become more aware of the value of counselling in situations of loss and not only when the child has emotional-behavioural problems.</p> |
| <p>46. I ran ... my whole life I ran away. I think circumstantial death like that is... is ... is a terribly hard thing to come to terms with. I could see it in my mother as well. My father died years after my brother and there was acceptance but in a death like that ... sudden ... and of a child as well, you know,</p> | <p>46. Based on her own experience and on her observation of her mother's grief, Cathy becomes aware that it is harder to come to terms with a sudden death of a young person than with the death of an older person, and she realises that this also contributed to her reluctance to accept her</p> |

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| <p>of a young person ... You accept when someone is older and has had a life and you don't accept ... And I think that was also a part. Well it's harder and I didn't want to accept ...</p> | <p>brother's death and to her tendency to run away from this reality all her life.</p> |
| <p>47. I ... Do you know, I ... I often ... he was quite a bit younger. I think he was 5 years younger and my interests were totally different to him. I actually can't even remember ... at school ... I can remember him going to school. He went to Y... (primary school) and then he went to boarding school and ... I remember him as a young man, not so much as a child. I remember him as a young man.</p> | <p>47. Cathy has few childhood memories of her brother, as he was some 5 years younger than her, their interests were totally different and they did not consistently share the same space. However, she remembers him well as a young man.</p> |
| <p>48. I think my mother was always very protective of him and she sort of kept ... um ... each one had his own little world, you know. I can't remember ever going to flick ... him coming with us to flick.</p> | <p>48. Cathy experienced her mother as always very protective of her brother and this differential treatment of her and her brother also kept them separate. Each lived in his/her own little world.</p> |
| <p>49. I went to boarding school in Std 6 and he stayed at home. Then he must have been in Std 3?, 4?, 2?. Then after Std 6 I came home. You know, he was there. He was there at supper and we got into serious trouble if we weren't home in time for afternoon tea, you know. There were times that I remember he was there but I can't remember ... ever being really close ... until he grew to a young man ... until he was about 17 - 18 then we started chatting and ... and I started picking him up wherever he was in the afternoon in the car ...I suppose it was normal. I never really...</p> | <p>49. Although Cathy and her brother were never really close as they were growing up, she began to draw closer to him when he was a young man (17-18 years) and they began to interact more.</p> |
| <p>50. He was very quiet, he had a very dry sense of humour ... um ... I don't know, he</p> | <p>50. Cathy experienced her brother as being more like her father in nature than like her</p> |

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| <p>definitely wasn't like my mother. He didn't have my mother's nature ... but I think he was like her family ... although I don't know... because my father, he had more my father's nature.</p> | <p>mother.</p> |
| <p>51. My mother ... um ... after he died she'd make remarks to me that, "you're not a C ... you're a M" ... you know, in a very nasty way, and [that] my brother was a C ... And I have a cousin in T whose surname is C ... and she said, "He's not a C ... he's more like his mother!" you know (laughed).</p> | <p>51. After her brother's death, her mother distinguished between Cathy and her brother by identifying him with her side of the family and almost contemptuously relegating Cathy to the "other" side.</p> |
| <p>52. But she developed a sort of a ... after I was born I think she had a resentment towards me and it came out even after my brother died and I think that made me even more ... feel even more guilty that my brother had died. You know that she had lost the one that she was fondest of ... that she became very peculiar</p> | <p>52. Cathy believed that her mother resented her from birth and this revealed itself more clearly after her brother died and left her feeling more guilty that her mother had lost her most cherished child, and that she became so unstable.</p> |
| <p>53. ... and looking back I realise that it was emotional instability ... I mean, you lose 3 children you can't be absolutely normal can you?. I don't think so and I think I experienced it. You <i>cannot</i>.... And ... but as she's grown older ... I think she's ... let me tell you she was hard until she was about 85. Only now between 85 and 90 has she mellowed and I think that it was also her way of sorrowing.</p> | <p>53. In retrospect Cathy realises that having lost three children to death, her mother could not be expected to be emotionally stable and she begins to understand that her mother's extremely harsh behaviour towards her may have been her mother's way of coping with her grief.</p> |
| <p>54. You know, I think when you lose a brother or a sister ... you know, after your question came, I thought if someone had counselled me on my mother's behaviour, I think that would have been a tremendous help ...</p> | <p>54. To this day, Cathy regrets that she did not receive any professional support which she believes would have been of great value to her in helping her to understand her mother's behaviour.</p> |
| <p>55. ... because you fight in the dark, you know,</p> | <p>55. For years Cathy struggled with her pain</p> |

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| <p>you have this person that is your <i>mother</i> that is reacting so <i>abnormally</i> towards you and you don't know why. And here you are, you're battling with all this pain and there's no help. And it went on after his death for years. As I say only 85 she was still saying to me ... about 86 ... that I'm not a C--- and she would say it in such a nasty way, you're a M---, meantime I was so proud that I was a M---, but she....she ... you know, she had to break that down. Really she became ...</p> | <p>and there was no support. Her mother's hurtful comments and atypical reactions confused and hurt her, and she felt that she was fighting a lonely battle in the dark.</p> |
| <p>56. ... and <i>that</i> I think is a very, very important aspect of [the loss] ... the mother's reaction towards the child ... the children that stay behind, <i>that</i> perhaps is even more important than how the child feels about the loss . To me, I think it meant ... because it became an abnormal situation.</p> | <p>56. Cathy believes that the atypical relationship with her mother played a significant part in her loss experience and she feels that a mother's reaction towards the remaining child(ren) is even more important than how the sibling feels about the loss of a brother or sister.</p> |
| <p>57. If someone had helped <i>her</i> and helped <i>me</i>. Perhaps even after my sister's death if someone had helped her <i>then</i>. But my mother's a very proud person and ... I think <i>that</i> in many ways caused a lot of extra pain ...</p> | <p>57. Cathy believes that it would have been helpful if she and her mother could have had some support and if someone could have helped her mother even after her first loss, but she is aware that her mother is a very stubborn person and that this caused a lot of additional pain.</p> |
| <p>58. ... <i>with</i> the loss and the guilt and everything else that came with the death of my brother ... her very strange behaviour ... Um ... and of course you don't realise that because you yourself are destroyedI mean I was destroyed after that ... emotionally,</p> | <p>58. Cathy herself was emotionally shattered by the loss, but with all the pain and the guilt, she also had to endure her mother's strange behaviour which she did not initially understand.</p> |
| <p>59. You know what else happened? Our friends couldn't cope with our sorrow so they stayed away. So here I was left as an only child and all my friends were running</p> | <p>59. In addition, their friends could not cope with their grief and avoided the family. Now the only child, Cathy felt very alone; rejected by her mother and abandoned by</p> |

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| <p>away. No one ever discussed.... They'd say to you : "Have your parents got over the death of your brother?", you know that sort of thing and um..... there was no one that I could talk to ... um ... or ... and even tell about my mother's behaviour.</p> | <p>her friends, she had no one to talk to or to share her concerns about her mother's behaviour.</p> |
| <p>60. Sorry, it [i.e. mother's behaviour] was strange before my brother died. Ja, it was already.... As I say she was a bit unbalanced ... quite unbalanced, before my brother died ... um ... and I think it was all wrapped up with my sister's death and ... um ... I never even knew that I had a sister that had died. I can remember looking through a photo album and saying "Who's this?" and my mother saying: "Oh, it's just a child, a cousin", or something. Never telling me that that is your sister. So she was also running you know and ... and ... trying really ... and you know you don't shake off that baggage. It goes with you. Her baggage went with her and my baggage was mine.</p> | <p>60. Cathy experienced her mother as unbalanced even before her brother died and she believes that this was linked to the loss of another child, a sister of whom Cathy had no knowledge, as the family never spoke about the death. She realises that her mother was also trying to escape from her pain but that her "baggage" went with her just as Cathy's "baggage" stayed with her.</p> |
| <p>61. I think it has [strengthened me]. I hope it has made me a nicer person and not embittered me like it did to my mother.</p> | <p>61. Cathy believes that her loss experience has strengthened her, and hopes that it has made her a nicer person and not embittered her as it did her mother.</p> |
| <p>62. You know she became terribly possessive of my father. It was very strange. At times I thought she <i>hated</i> me ... um ...</p> | <p>62. After the loss, her mother held on to Cathy's father and there were moments when Cathy believed that her mother "<i>hated</i>" her.</p> |
| <p>63. Lately it doesn't worry me (laughed). I think as I've grown older ... and that is what I am saying, not only does the child encounter the loss of the ... but the mother <i>reacts</i> in strange ways to the loss of a child</p> | <p>63. With time, Cathy has become less troubled by her mother's behaviour towards her but she remains acutely aware that with the death of a child the sibling not only loses a brother or sister but that the mother also</p> |

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| <p>and I think it is so important that the child be counselled to that as well ... to that part of the circumstances that come after</p> | <p>reacts in strange ways to the loss and she recognises the need for counselling the surviving child for the situations that follow the loss as well.</p> |
| <p>64. I don't even think that the parents even realise that the child also has pain ... I mean at no time would it ever ... the only time, when we sat at dinner, that my mother acknowledged that we were all hurting ... I think she acknowledged that my father was hurting.</p> | <p>64. Although her mother acknowledged that Cathy's father was hurting, she only once admitted that they were <i>all</i> hurting, and Cathy believes that parents are not even aware that the sibling is also grieving.</p> |
| <p>65. I have anger towards my mother. I don't have anger towards what happened. I have sadness. I am sad about what happened but I am not angry... but I <i>am</i> angry with my mother. Her reaction and her insensitive behaviour towards me and I think that is why I never ever told her that I told him to use the car. Because as it was I was <i>suffering</i> her behaviour and I could never ... relate that ...</p> | <p>65. Cathy feels only sadness, not anger, about the loss of her brother, but she is angry with her mother for her hurtful reactions and insensitivity, which, she believes, prevented her from speaking about the thing that most worried her: her guilt surrounding the circumstances of her brother's death.</p> |
| <p>66. I couldn't tell anyone until I went to Lifeline. You know they don't counsel. You just talk and then off you go home and you battle it out, you know. Ja. It brought it out and for the first time I could say that I felt so guilty and that ... they asked: "what actually did the guilt do to you?", and I think ...you know, I don't know ...</p> | <p>66. Cathy held on to her secret, totally alone in her feelings and unable to share this with anybody. It was only when she went for counselling that she could express openly for the first time the deep sense of guilt that she carried and could reflect on the impact that this emotion had on her.</p> |
| <p>67. It's such a ... death is such a tricky ... and the sorrow that comes with it ... it's many faceted. It isn't just <i>sorrow</i> ... ja, ja, there's so many aspects to sorrow and as I said it's like a whirlpool something comes up then ... whew! It's away, and then a few months later, or a few years later, something else</p> | <p>67. Cathy experienced death as deceptive and the grief that accompanied her loss as multifaceted. It was not only sorrow, but rather like a whirlpool of different emotions and thoughts that surfaced and disappeared unexpectedly over a long period of time.</p> |

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| <p>pops up, and um</p> | |
| <p>68. I think ... if I look back as to how I feel about my brother's death, it was a great loss for my parents, not for me. It ... I don't think it was ... I ever acknowledged that I had the right to cry ... or I had to feel sorry for ... because I was alive, do you understand? Here I am alive, how can I feel sad? They must feel sad because they've lost ... do you understand? They've lost a child, you ... you ... I was ... and I think after it happened I went into that hazy world of ... of... you're not allowed to be sorrowful because you're alive and it's their child that died not yours, do you understand?</p> | <p>68. Reflecting on the meaning of the loss of her brother, Cathy concludes that it was a tremendous loss for her parents because they had lost a child. She realises that she never owned the loss or gave herself permission to be sorrowful, assuming that because she had not lost a child and because she was alive, she was not entitled to grieve or to be unhappy.</p> |
| <p>69. Do you know that on my brother's gravestone ... (very emotional – long pause) ... on my brother's gravestone ... (weeping bitterly and struggling to express her intense emotions) ... I've never, ever said this ... on my brother's gravestone, it says ... "our son". I was there shortly after he died when we were washing the gravestone and I saw then, "our son" and I put it away, you know, just filed it away ... and it has just come up now ...</p> | <p>69. Initially Cathy was hurt when she noticed that her relationship to her brother was excluded from the inscription on his tombstone. The lack of acknowledgement of the very existence of the brother-sister relationship wounded her but she pushed the hurt aside and only now realises how deeply painful this exclusion was for her.</p> |
| <p>70. Ja, ja. No one ever sympathised or asked me how I felt or ... perhaps they did and then I closed up, I don't know, you know. You ... You ... I think you cope with it the best you can and perhaps ... but I cannot remember anybody, barring that person that came up after the funeral. I remember <i>that</i> very clearly so I'm sure I would have remembered other things. I think, you</p> | <p>70. Others outside the family did not acknowledge Cathy's loss and while she is uncertain whether or not she withdrew, she is very aware that apart from the one person who approached her after the funeral, nobody else asked her how she felt or commiserated with her. She sensed that people outside their bereavement could not cope with their grief and consequently</p> |

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| <p>know, I always got the feeling that people <i>outside</i> your sorrow couldn't cope with ...so what they did they avoid eventually and I always put it down to that - that they can't cope so (they avoid). But the fact that I could remember that one person at the funeral coming I'm sure no one else did otherwise I would have remembered it.</p> | <p>avoided the family.</p> |
| <p>71. But there was ... um ... I think there was an awareness of my sorrow but no acknowledgement ... not my mother or even my father. I think perhaps they were, I don't know, I'm just saying perhaps they were so involved in their sorrow that um ... my ... I do know I was outside the whole ... I was an onlooker.</p> | <p>71. Although Cathy believes that there may have been an awareness of her sorrow, neither her mother nor her father actually acknowledged her grief and she felt outside the whole experience: an observer, an "onlooker".</p> |
| <p>72. I experienced the attention being on me. Ja my mother's total absorption with me ... but not my father. My father was a very sensible man. I mean he also lost three children. But my mother became totally absorbed in ... and there I think if they had been counselled, if someone had told them how to handle it instead of becoming frightened of it and running away from it as well and in many ways becoming obstinate ... It became a ... I don't know. I often thought perhaps she was fearful that something would happen to me but she never expressed it. I perceived it as a mother that is over possessive. That's how I felt about it. She never gave me freedom to express opinions or express ideas that ... she was totally irrational ... before my brother died ... (and got worse after his death) Yes. She became ... um ... and then</p> | <p>72. After the loss, Cathy experienced her mother's attention focused entirely on her and felt bound by her controlling and possessive behaviour, which deprived Cathy of the freedom to be herself. Although her father, who had also suffered three losses, remained very reasonable, her mother's behaviour vacillated considerably and Cathy believes that, had her parents received counselling, they might not have been frightened and tried to escape from the pain.</p> |

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| <p>at other times ... you know it wasn't a permanent type of thing. At times she was normal and other times she was totally irrational.</p> | |
| <p>73. And my father was fully aware that there was this but we never really discussed. I knew he knew and that made me feel safe, you know, the fact that he was aware of it, but we never discussed "why?". He was aware because of her behaviour. (He could see) and he'd wink at me or ... he'd, you know, he'd try ... I had a terrific relationship with him ... If it wasn't for him I think I would have... it was very, very trying after my brother died.</p> | <p>73. Cathy valued the close relationship with her father and the silent understanding that they shared, and she realises that the fact that she knew that he was aware of what she was going through with her mother made her feel safe and helped her through this very difficult time.</p> |
| <p>74. She became vicious. I think she used me as a sort of a hitting ... like a boxer hits at something and she could verbally hit. It was very destructive, that's all I know. But also ... it was destructive in as much that, as I said to you earlier, I felt I had no worth.</p> | <p>74. Cathy felt that her mother used her as a target at which she directed her anger. Like a boxer lashing out, her mother's vicious verbal attacks were very destructive and left Cathy feeling worthless.</p> |
| <p>75. I ... only these last few years that I felt ... I am free of ... of ... to a certain extent confined ... whole thing put on me. As though I'm starting to be my own person, not ... trying to be someone else's person.....</p> | <p>75. It is only very recently (last few years) that Cathy has been able to overcome the burden of responsibility and the constraints imposed on her to be someone else, and she has started to become her own person.</p> |
| <p>76. There was very little discussion. As I say, 15 years we never mentioned his name and each one has developed into his own little cocoon. I think my father took his sorrow into his little cocoon and my mother into hers. And there was never any open talk or ... how we felt or ... you know, and I often wondered, do other families behave like that?</p> | <p>76. For 15 years there was scant discussion of the death, never any talk of their feelings, and the taboo of her brother's name remained. Cathy realises that they all withdrew into their own cocoon, each one dealing with his or her own sorrow.</p> |

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| <p>77. But I do think there is a link between your health and sorrow.</p> | <p>77. Cathy believes that there is a relationship between one's physical wellbeing and bereavement.</p> |
| <p>78. I think it became a very low...um... intellectual period; a period where I cannot remember anything happening. It was a stagnant period. Um...[For] Years. I think a lot of this had to do with my self-image. If you got a self-image... a good self-image, then your growth is faster. If you have a bad self-image...that's how I worked it out...you know, now that we're thinking about it. I've always felt that I am not capable of much because of ... and I never even thought about it, you know!</p> | <p>78. After the loss, Cathy felt stuck and immobilised and did not achieve much. For many years, she believed that she was incapable of doing anything and in retrospect she realises that this was related to her negative sense of self that inhibited her growth.</p> |

TABLE II
Participant 1: Cathy

Constituents of the Individual Situated Structure of the Loss of a Sibling

1. Lingered Sadness (1,33,65)

For Cathy, the primacy of the experience of the loss of her brother is so present to her that many years (39 years) after his death she still feels as though it has just happened. She still thinks about, and grieves over her brother as he was when he died, and the *sadness* over the loss *lingers*.

2. Fear, Confusion, Disbelief and Withdrawal (2,3,4,5,6,7)

The reality of her brother's accident rips Cathy from her familiar world and throws her into a state of absolute *fear, confusion and disbelief* which blocks out rational thought. She and her brother are far from home and she feels very alone, frightened and confused. Despite medical confirmation that her brother's injuries are fatal, Cathy holds on to the hope that her brother will recover, and resists accepting the seriousness of his condition and the reality of what has happened. She experiences a sense of unreality and *withdraws*, unable even to remember whether she went in to see her brother or not. Once her parents arrive at the hospital, her mother takes charge and Cathy withdraws even further from the dreadful reality. Her absence from her brother's bedside (sits outside his room) when he dies, goes unnoticed and Cathy experiences the loss through her mother's uncontrolled and agonised expression of grief. On the journey home, Cathy's body yields to the reality of the death and the loss is experienced somatically; as an extreme coldness. However, her grief remains unexpressed and frozen.

3. Outsider-Observer (8,9,10,11,12,14,68,69,70,71)

Shortly after her brother's death, and even at the funeral and later, Cathy experiences the loss as something that is not part of her. In the awareness of her parents' intense pain, she feels strangely apart from what has happened, like an *outsider* who is simply *observing* her parents' profound sorrow. In addition, she is painfully aware that her loss is largely ignored by others. Recognising her own tendency to withdraw from painful situations, Cathy questions whether it was because she withdrew or because others were more in touch with her parents' loss of their child. The suddenness of the death, compounded by the absence of any acknowledgement that she too was hurting, gives a quality of unreality to the loss, and Cathy feels outside the whole experience. Her sense of being an outsider is strengthened by the fact that, apart from one person at the funeral who commiserated with her, no one else acknowledges that she is part of the grieving family. She feels that she does not own the grief, assuming that it is her parents' loss and not hers. Feeling excluded, Cathy cannot give herself permission to grieve openly. She conceals her pain believing that she is not entitled to be sad. Feelings of being an outsider-observer exacerbate her sense of unreality and memories of events following the death become completely obscure and vague ("hazy").

Later, the exclusion of her relationship from the inscription on her brother's tombstone (only "Our Son" was recorded) adds to her sense of not being part of the grief; it was her parents' son that had died, while he was "*only*" her brother. Cathy feels deeply wounded by this omission but pushes her hurt aside. Although she believes that there may have been an awareness of her sorrow, neither her mother nor her father actually acknowledge her loss and she continues to feel outside the whole experience, an "onlooker". However, recent reflection clarifies for Cathy the ambiguity of her lived experience and she realises that, while she felt like an outsider, she simultaneously felt torn and deeply hurt.

4. Evading the Reality of the Loss (13,16,21,27,34,35,36,37,41,42,46)

Feelings of unreality and disbelief persist for a long time after the death and Cathy *evades the reality of the loss*. It becomes a very "hazy" period, one that she seldom revisits or reflects on. She is aware of her natural inclination to escape ("run away") from painful situations and, while the objective reality, that it was "all over", does strike home when she sees her brother's body in the open coffin, emotionally she continues to resist accepting the loss. She struggles with memories of the past and the anticipation of the pain that lies ahead in the future, and cannot accept the finality of death.

For a long time after the funeral, Cathy's way of living the loss is by trying to avoid the full force of the pain and to recover the pre-loss state. She recalls waking up every morning with the conviction that the death had not occurred, listening for the sounds that her brother used to make, believing that it was all a "dream"; that her brother was still "here", alive. She represses significant detail relating to her brother's death but realises that she does not lose the memories, and that the vacillation between remembering and forgetting depended on her emotional state and whether she wanted to remember or not. Cathy recognises that this dialectic - the "not remembering"/"not knowing" is also part of her "not wanting" to accept her brother's death. It distresses her that even though she has seen her brother's gravestone many times, she still cannot remember when he died. Her difficulty in confronting the reality of the loss of her brother is amplified by the fact that his death was sudden, premature and potentially avoidable.

Cathy recognises that acceptance and full realisation of the loss came over time but, to this day, she is still haunted by certain sights and sounds that she associates with her brother and that remain a constant and painful reminder of the past. She continues to avoid certain objects (car) that remind her of her brother's death, and also has a parcel of his belongings that travels with her wherever she goes but which remains unopened. Cathy realises that she is still trying to evade the pain of the loss.

5. The Desire to Protect Parents (15,17,20,22)

After the funeral, as the family attempts to return to everyday living, Cathy resolves (makes a “pact”) to continue living at home (for 3 years) in order to *protect* her *parents*. In the *desire* to shield them from the pain and to maintain the existing family integrity, she tries to eliminate painful reminders of her deceased brother from the immediate environment. Fear, confusion and helplessness arise as Cathy witnesses her mother's unremitting grief, which cannot always be contained. In time, Cathy realises that, much as she would like to, she cannot take away her parents' pain, and that with such a tragedy each one has to cope with his or her own sorrow.

6. The Conspiracy of Silence (18,19,26,31,44,59,60,76)

With the loss, a cloak of *silence* descends upon the family. Living with the haunting presence of her brother, Cathy experiences the family's existence as extremely strange. Although their shared grief is visible, no one acknowledges her brother's "existence" or speaks about him and the fact that they are mourning. Her mother only once mentions the accident but there is no open discussion about the loss or about the circumstances of her brother's death. Neither Cathy nor her parents ever mention his name or speak about their feelings and they all withdraw into themselves, each dealing with his or her own grief. Unable to cope with the family sorrow, others outside their grief also avoid them, maintaining the *conspiracy of silence* and Cathy is painfully aware of being very alone in her feelings. She holds on to her pain, unable to talk about her feelings to anybody.

Many years (fifteen years) after her brother's death, the anticipated death of her father reactivates the pain of her brother's death and Cathy finally breaks the silence and speaks to her mother about her brother for the first time. After that they are able to talk about him but they still never mention the circumstances of the death. Based on an incident where her brother had experienced the traumatic loss of a friend (to suicide), Cathy realises that, even before the loss of her brother, death was taboo within the family and that her parents never spoke about the subject or asked them (i.e. the children) how they felt. Later, Cathy relates the family's silence surrounding death to previous family losses (2 other children) which had been shrouded in secrecy and of which Cathy had been totally unaware. She realises that her parents were always afraid of death and avoided any talk about the subject.

7. Guilt and Self-Blame (24,28,29,30,38,52,65,66)

For many years, Cathy experienced a deep sense of *guilt* and felt responsible for the death of her brother. Since she had insisted that he use the car on the night of the accident, she assumed the *blame*. Her sense of being-to-blame was so deep-seated that she never even considered questioning God or "why" he had allowed this to happen. Cathy blamed herself for the loss of her brother, she blamed herself for her parents' loss, for their incredible pain and for her mother's instability.

Central to the guilt was her tacit understanding that she was the less favoured child; the "outsider" in her mother's eyes. Her mother's open admission that she had lost her favourite child, something that Cathy had always "known" but which had never before been openly expressed, wounded her deeply and for many years she felt that she had no worth. In the knowledge that her mother had lost her most cherished child, Cathy's sense of guilt is amplified and this prevents her from talking about the loss or disclosing the circumstances of her brother's death. To talk about this might open her to accusations or further verbal attacks from her mother, whose intense grief knows no bounds. She holds on to her secret, unable to share this with anybody.

It is only when she goes for counselling that Cathy is able to confront the truth of what lay inside her for so long; only then is she able to say how responsible ("guilty") she really feels about her brother's death. Confronting the reality and depth of her guilt is a painful and lonely experience, but she succeeds in working through the guilt to a certain extent. Although she still feels responsible for the loss of her brother, Cathy realises that she has to let go of the guilt and move on with her life.

8. Parents' Bereavement (23,25,31,32,51,52,53,54,55,56,62,63,72,74,75,77,78)

- *Visiting the Cemetery (23,25)*

Going to the *cemetery*, an absolute ritual for her parents, became extremely stressful for Cathy and gradually she withdrew. She herself was in a terrible state after the loss and was deeply concerned about her parents whose grief continued unabated. With each visit to the cemetery, her parents' visible pain, confused and frightened her and she feared that their grief could destroy them. Witnessing her parents' physical and emotional deterioration, confused by what was happening to them, and frightened by the possibility of further loss, Cathy eventually confronted her mother expressing her fear that the ritualistic visits to the cemetery were potentially destroying her father. In an inexplicable way, Cathy's honest reaction forwarded her parents' mourning and they improved after this confrontation. However, the silence surrounding the circumstances of her brother's death persisted and Cathy could not unburden herself of her guilt or openly express her grief.

- *Sense of worthlessness (24,31,32,51,74,77,78)*

Even before her brother's death, Cathy experienced her mother as being very hard on her, never on her brother. As a child, she was confused by the lack of closeness with her mother and by her father's insistence that Cathy maintain the peace in the home by 'keeping quiet'. Although later she was able to make sense of her father's protectiveness towards her mother and her mother's perceived resentment of her when she learnt that her mother had lost a child during her pregnancy with Cathy, her mother's harsh and alienating behaviour evoked a sense of *worthlessness* that intensified after her brother's death. Cathy was devastated by her mother's admission that she had lost her "favourite" child and by

her mother's constant and invidious comparisons of her with her deceased brother and her vicious verbal attacks.

After the loss, she felt stuck and immobilised and did not achieve very much. As she struggles to regain a sense of worth from an abandoned position, Cathy becomes aware of the link between a positive sense of self and growth. For many years she felt incapable of doing anything and she realises that this was related to her negative self-image, and that this inhibited her personal growth. She also becomes aware of the link between her health and the stress of grief and remains acutely aware that her mother's earlier bereavement, of which she was not a part, had the most profound impact on her self-confidence and self-esteem.

- *Previous losses and alienation (31,51,53,54,55,62)*

From a young age, Cathy felt her mother's harsh and *alienating* resentment towards her and was confused not knowing that her parents had suffered *previous losses* (two other children). With the loss of her brother, her mother's rejection of her intensified and Cathy became the target of her mother's anger and pain. In addition, her mother became extremely possessive of her father and, at times, Cathy even considered that her mother 'hated' her. Later when she realises that her mother's harsh behaviour towards her was an instability stemming from the loss of three children, she is able to understand that this was her mother's way of sorrowing and that her anger and verbal attacks were also part of her grief. However, for many years Cathy felt that she was fighting a lonely battle in the dark and she is aware that her mother's unresolved grief ("baggage") left her unable to support her (i.e. Cathy). She realises that her mother's atypical behaviour became a source of additional pain and Cathy regrets the lack of professional support that would have enabled her better to understand her mother's reactions following the loss.

- *Intensified attention and rejection (56,63,72,75)*

Left as an only child, Cathy experienced her mother's *attention* as focused on her and felt bound by her controlling and possessive behaviour that deprived Cathy of the freedom to be herself. Although she considered that this might have been based on concern, a fear that something might happen to her, her mother never openly expressed this fear and Cathy felt that she could not get close to her mother. It became an abnormal situation where her mother's attention on her *intensified* while simultaneously Cathy felt *rejected*.

In the emotional turmoil and the dialectic of closeness-distance, Cathy struggled for stability and survival. She has become aware that when one loses a brother or a sister, the mother's reaction towards the surviving child(ren) is possibly even more painful than how the sibling feels about the loss. For Cathy, her mother's anger and *rejection* were particularly painful and traumatic. It is only in

the last few years that she has been able to overcome the burden of the constraints imposed on her to be who her mother wanted her to be and has started to become her own person.

9. Loneliness and Isolation (15,55,58,59,62,64,70,76)

For Cathy, the loss of her brother was an extremely *lonely* experience. Despite the desire to alleviate her parents' suffering, she found that each member of the family coped *alone* with their own sorrow. Cathy and her parents all withdrew into their own "cocoon" and developed separately. In the relationship with her mother, Cathy felt alienated and rejected. While she herself was emotionally destroyed after the loss, her mother also distanced herself from Cathy by aligning herself with her deceased son and denying the brother-sister relationship. Although her mother acknowledged that Cathy's father was hurting, she only once acknowledged that they were *all* hurting and by implication that Cathy was also grieving. In her pain and neediness, her mother also clung to Cathy's father and appropriated this relationship. Thus, with the grief and the guilt that she experienced at the loss of her brother, Cathy also felt abandoned and for years she struggled alone with her pain.

In her relationship with others, Cathy felt ignored and ostracised. Others did not communicate with her or ask her how she felt. People enquired about her parents but no one commiserated with her in a meaningful way. Left as an only child, Cathy felt totally alone; rejected by her mother and abandoned by her friends, she had no one that she could talk to or discuss her mother's behaviour. She experiences a sense of absolute *loneliness* and *isolation*. She is unable to share the burden of her pain or her existential confusion arising from the loss and exacerbated by her own guilt and her mother's grief. She holds onto her hurt, totally alone in her feelings and unable to share her fears with anybody. Cathy's unexpressed hurt at being ignored by others is integrated later as she comes to realise that people "outside" one's sorrow cannot cope with one's grief and so eventually avoid one.

10. Letting go of Negative Feelings (29,30,31,32,53,61,63,65)

In time, Cathy realises that searching for reasons for her mother's harsh behaviour towards her is futile. She recognises that in order to move towards acceptance, she has to *let go of her negative feelings* (anger, hurt and guilt) that she held onto. When she learns that her parents had suffered previous losses, she is better able to cope with her mother's resentment and perceived rejection of her when she was a child. She realises that having lost three children, her mother could not be expected to be emotionally stable and she begins to understand that her mother's harsh behaviour may also have been part of her way of coping with her grief. In the understanding that her mother's instability stemmed in part from the loss of three children, Cathy moves towards forgiveness. She is able to let go of the hurt and pain and moves ambivalently towards accepting that the relationship simply existed as such. However, she remains acutely aware of the negative impact that her mother's behaviour has had on her own confidence and sense of self-worth and she retains anger towards her mother for her

lack of sensitivity. She still blames her mother for her vicious behaviour towards her following the loss of her brother but recognises that her anger could embitter her as it did her mother, which is something that she resists. She feels strengthened by her loss experience and hopes that in the process she has become a "nicer" person. In fact, the residue of Cathy's anger is transformed positively into a heightened awareness of the needs of bereaved children and becomes integrated into her lived experience of the loss of her brother. Transcending her own hurt, she sees more clearly how traumatic loss can be and she passionately champions the cause of support for bereaved children.

Although Cathy believes that she has worked through her guilt to a certain extent, she is aware that she still blames herself for the accident, as she has never discussed the circumstances of her brother's death with her parents. Cathy realises that, in order to move on with her life, she has to move beyond self-blame and let go of her guilt, just as she let go of the hurt of knowing that her brother was her mother's favourite child. However, she finds it difficult to forgive herself for insisting that her brother use the car and holds on to her guilt unable fully to confront the pain of her own loss.

11. Bereavement and vacillation (37,39,67)

For Cathy, *bereavement* was like a whirlpool of a host of different emotions that could not be faced immediately or all at once. Although she concealed and avoided acknowledging the reality of her own loss, she was constantly aware of her unresolved inner pain and the bewildering turbulence within. Her grief was multifaceted. It was not just sorrow nor just a moment circumscribed in time that she could visualise and face once and for all. Emotions surfaced unexpectedly in different forms, intensities and duration, challenging her emotionally before she suppressed them again and hid her feelings. She realises that she could deal with the painful emotions for a short time only and then needed to seal them off again. She expresses concern about small children who do not fully understand what is happening but simultaneously recognises the ambiguity of her own emotions. She *vacillates* between understanding and not understanding, knowing and not knowing, remembering and not remembering, acceptance and non-acceptance and realises that these paradoxical emotions arise through the painful awareness that death is final; of looking towards a horizon without that person and wanting to avoid the pain that lies ahead in the future.

12. Leaving Home (40)

Having honoured her 'pact' to stay at home and protect her parents, Cathy stands by her initial decision to *leave home* after three years, realising that for her own emotional and physical well-being she had to move away from the heavy atmosphere in the family. While she was aware of her tendency to escape from painful situations, in leaving home she never considered the possibility of escaping the pain of the loss. Cathy realised that from this pain there was no escape and all the emotions went with her as though she had "packed them" in her "suitcase".

13. The Sibling Attachment (43,47,48,49,50)

Cathy did not have a very close relationship with her brother and she has only vague memories of him as they were growing up. He was quite a bit younger than she was and as children they did not consistently share the same interests or the same space. In addition, Cathy's mother was always very protective of her brother, never of Cathy, and this also kept them separate so that they lived in their own worlds. Although Cathy cannot remember ever being really close to her brother, she was aware of his presence and recalls that they were in the "same boat" if they came home late. They started to become friends shortly before he died, when he was a young man (of 17-18 years) and they were able to share more. Cathy started to get to know her brother better and she remembers fondly that he was more like her cherished father than like her mother. As her brother matured and the relationship became a more egalitarian one, the potential for more sharing existed but this was cut short by his premature death.

14. The Value of Professional Support (45,54,57)

On looking back on her loss experience, Cathy realises how traumatic loss can be and recognises the *value of professional support* in a grief situation. It is only retrospectively that she becomes aware of the link between her mother's intense pain and anger and her hurtful behaviour, and she realises that outside support would have been helpful. She feels that it would have been beneficial if she had been counselled on her mother's behaviour and/or if someone had counselled her mother even after the loss of her first child. Having experienced the benefits of counselling herself, Cathy is acutely aware of the importance of counselling not only for the individual-sibling-in-grief, but also for the parents and for the circumstances that follow loss in a family. She recognises the need to break through the social denial of loss as a life event deserving of counselling and she feels that parents and others should develop a greater awareness of the value of counselling in situations of loss and not only when the child presents with emotional-behavioural problems. She remains acutely aware that children need help since loss is very traumatic.

15. Lack of Entitlement to Grieve (68,69,70,71)

On reflection, Cathy realises that her brother's death meant a great loss and sadness for her parents but not for her. They had lost a child, and he was "only" her brother. Her loss and the existence of her relationship with her brother was never really acknowledged, and she herself never gave herself permission to cry or to feel sad. She assumed that because her parents had lost a child and because she was alive, she was not allowed to be sorrowful. In the face of her parents' devastating loss, Cathy felt that she was *not entitled to grieve*. The existence of her relationship to her brother and her right to mourn his loss was denied in different ways both by her parents and by friends, and Cathy felt excluded and invisible. She veiled her pain, and perceived the loss exclusively within the context of

the parent-child relationship and not in the context of the brother-sister relationship. In retrospect Cathy believes that there may have been an awareness of her sorrow, but this was never openly acknowledged by her parents or by others. Within the complexity of all the relationships and emotions, Cathy struggled with the question of "who owned the loss?" never fully confronting her grief.

16. Father's Validating Presence (72,73)

Although Cathy's *father* also lost three children, he reacted differently to her mother and remained a very consistent and sensible man. Cathy valued the close relationship with her father and although they never discussed her mother's irrational behaviour, Cathy knew that he was aware of this and there was a silent, but mutual, understanding between them that provided the *validation* and support which she needed to restore a sense of security and stability in her world. This enabled Cathy to endure the intensely difficult period after her brother's death.

TABLE III
Participant 1: Cathy

Situated Narrative Description :
"A Ghostly Silence"

There is a lingering quality to Cathy's grief over the loss of her sibling. Thirty-nine years after her nineteen year-old brother's death in a motor vehicle accident, her experience of the loss is still so present to her that she feels as if it has just happened and a deep sadness persists. She remembers and grieves for her brother as he was when he died and she is still haunted by certain sights and sounds which she associates with him and which remain constant and painful reminders of the past.

As a child Cathy did not have a particularly close attachment to her brother. He was some five years younger than she was and they did not consistently share the same space or interests. Contributing to their distance was her mother's differential treatment of them. She was much harder on Cathy and always very protective of her brother. Living in "separate" worlds they did not play together. Implicit is some ambivalence towards her brother as he was the one embraced in the circle of mother's love and caring. Yet their lives were woven into the same fabric of existence. Cathy remembers that her brother was there, part of her experiential world, although not in a focused way. Later as he matured, Cathy and her brother found themselves in the same egalitarian "boat" and both would get into trouble if they came home late. Although the relationship had not been a close one, as her brother matured, they were able to share more, and they started to become friends a few years before his death.

On the night of the accident, Cathy and her brother had gone on an outing to a city far from home. She was in the cinema when she received news that her brother had had a bad accident. At first, Cathy felt shocked and was overcome with absolute fear. She was immediately aware of her parents' absence and of being alone and felt confused and helpless as fear immobilised her. It emerges later that her brother had had a previous accident and had been hospitalised. Also Cathy always suspected that her brother was her mother's favourite child. Thus, the fear can be understood not only as a reaction to the shock of the news that something had happened to her brother but also as an awareness of what this would mean to her parents, more specifically to her mother, as the loss of a child existed as a dreaded but submerged possibility within the family. In addition, Cathy had fear because on that fateful evening she had angrily insisted that her brother use the car and, for many years, she was tormented by feelings of personal responsibility and guilt.

While Cathy was cognitively aware of the seriousness of her brother's condition and this was confirmed by the doctor, she did not want to accept the reality of what had happened and continued to hope that he would recover. The suddenness of the loss gave the experience a sense of unreality and she remembers events only vaguely. Waiting for her parents to arrive she felt dazed (fell "half-

asleep”) and could not remember whether or not she went in to see her brother. On the arrival of her parents, everything became even more obscure (“hazy”) and Cathy felt totally out of touch, wanting to evade the reality of what happened. She withdrew and her mother took charge. At the moment of his death Cathy sat outside her brother's room while her parents remained at his bedside. She heard her mother's intense outcries of grief. On the journey home, Cathy's body yielded to the reality of the death and loss; she felt very cold.

Immediately after the death, Cathy felt largely ignored by those who came to offer their condolences to the family. She experienced an emotional distance from others but was uncertain whether this was because she withdrew or because people were more aware of her parents' intense grief. What she does remember is that apart from one person that commiserated with her at the funeral, no one else ever acknowledged her grief; or even noticed that she was part of the grieving family. The message she received from others was that the pain was in-her-parents and not in-her; it was *their* son that had died; he was *only* her brother. Still later, as an only child, Cathy experienced increased emotional distance when community members and friends shunned the family and even her own friends avoided her. People enquired about her parents but no one commiserated with her in a sincere or meaningful way. In retrospect, she realises that people outside the family's sorrow could not cope with their grief and so avoided them.

Even at the funeral and afterwards, Cathy felt strangely detached from what had happened; as though she was an "outsider-onlooker" observing her parents' terrific pain. She felt that the loss was not hers; that she was not even entitled to be sorrowful. Although Cathy's dominant feeling was that she was an outsider, recent reflection clarifies for her the ambiguity of her lived experience, namely that, emotionally she felt not only apart-from, but simultaneously and very painfully a-part-of the whole loss experience. Internally she felt torn and hurt but externally no one seemed to notice. The lack of acknowledgement that she too had suffered a significant loss intensified Cathy's existential confusion and the sense of unreality and separateness stayed with her for a long time.

Cathy felt excluded from the grieving family not only because others ignored her loss but also because the possibility that she was also grieving was never acknowledged within the family. Although her mother acknowledged that Cathy's father was hurting, she only once admitted that they were all hurting, and by implication, that Cathy was also hurting. Intensely painful and indelibly imprinted in her memory is the fact that her relationship to her brother was denied in a very tangible way: her name was not included in the inscription on his tombstone. The reference was only to “Our Son”.

In the awareness of her parents' profound pain, Cathy made a "pact" with herself to continue living at home for a specified period (three years) in an effort to protect them and facilitate their return to

“normal” life. However, much as she wanted to, Cathy felt unable to ameliorate her parents' suffering. She realised that with such a tragedy each one in the family had their own "baggage". Thrown into unprepared mourning, each person withdrew into his or her own protective cocoon and coped with his or her own pain.

After the funeral, a blanket of silence that was palpable fell over the family. The day-to-day living with their unvoiced grief was perplexing and extremely difficult for Cathy to bear. Every day every member of the family cried. At table they all sat and wept. She found it strange that her brother was so much part of their lives yet no one acknowledged his “existence” or spoke openly about their shared pain, so visible and audible to them all. Implicit is Cathy's hunger for, yet a fear of greater closeness to her parents, particularly to her mother. But there was simply no open discussion about the loss. Cathy and her parents never even mentioned her brother's name or spoke about their feelings. Later it emerges that Cathy's reticence arose partly from her inability to reveal that she had insisted that her brother use the car on the night of the accident; her parents' reticence, from the pain of having lost a third child. Both her own guilt and her mother's possible negative reaction put constraints upon the open disclosure of her feelings and the conspiracy of silence prevailed for many years.

Living at home and sensing the terrible hurt, Cathy felt that she was not entitled to grieve or to unburden herself of her guilt and she was painfully aware of being very alone in her feelings. Many years (fifteen years) after her brother's death, just before her father died, Cathy finally risked getting closer to her mother by breaking the silence and speaking to her about her brother for the first time. Thereafter, they were able to talk about him and Cathy managed to share her grief. However, they still never mentioned the circumstances of her brother's death. On reflection, Cathy is able to relate her parents' silence surrounding death to an earlier situation of loss (when her brother lost a friend) and she realises that, even before her brother's death, her parents never discussed feelings or asked them (i.e. her and her brother) how they felt. However, to this day, Cathy's anxiety about her perceived culpability prevents her from sharing this secret with her mother.

Constricted in the circle of silence by her own guilt, her mother's atypical behaviour, and the absence of helpful community, Cathy resorts to withdrawal/escape. Although rationally she knows that her brother is dead, emotionally she does not experience the death as a full reality. For a long time after the funeral she imagines, for brief moments at least, that her brother is still there, that it is a bad dream and she even listens for the sounds he used to make. Contributing to her denial and tendency to hold onto the pre-loss state is the sudden, potentially avoidable and premature nature of the death. Cathy's unacknowledged knowledge is reinforced by her parents' unabated mourning, by their deterioration and by her intention to protect them and herself. She evades the full force of her grief and struggles against memories of the past vacillating between “remembering” and “not remembering”, “knowing”

and “not knowing” and is aware that this dialectic was also part of her not-wanting-to-accept what had happened.

Cathy experienced death as deceptive; the accompanying bereavement, as multifaceted and bewildering. It was not simply sadness, nor was it a single moment circumscribed in time that could be visualised and faced once and for all. Her bereavement was like a whirlpool of many different emotions, surfacing and vanishing again over a long period of time. Emotions appeared in different forms, intensities and duration, challenging her ability to cope with more before she suppressed them again and concealed her feelings. She could deal with the painful emotions for a short time only and then closed them up again. She reflects on how difficult it must be for small children who do not fully understand what is happening. Yet Cathy recognises the ambiguity of understanding and not understanding. For her the painful awareness that death is irreversible, that the person is no longer there and the anticipation of the pain that lay ahead in the future made it even more difficult to accept what had happened. She did not want to go through all that pain again and continued to turn away from the reality of the loss.

Unable to integrate the past and afraid to face the future, Cathy was virtually immobilised by her conflicting emotions. She felt increasingly worthless and incompetent. She did not achieve very much and remembers the period after her brother's death as a very low intellectual period, a stagnant period, which lasted for many years. As she explores this aspect of her loss experience, new meaning emerges and Cathy becomes aware of the link between her low self-image and the lack of personal growth during this period. She also realises that there is a relationship between sorrow and one's physical well-being.

Her parents' ritualistic visits to the cemetery frightened and confused Cathy. Before her very eyes she witnessed their deterioration and feared the destruction of what remained of her family. Eventually, in anger and with fear, she told her mother that this “must stop” lest it destroy her father. It was then that her mother finally admitted that she had lost her favourite child, thus confirming Cathy's tacit understanding that her brother was her mother's most cherished child. This honesty promoted her parents' mourning and facilitated improvement. However, her mother's confession hurt, crushed, even devastated Cathy. Upon reflection she realises that her mother was basically hitting back at her own pain. However, that insight did not take away a lingering sense of worthlessness.

Since Cathy blamed herself for the accident - because she had insisted that her brother take the car on that night - she assumed the responsibility. Thus, it never occurred to her to question God or to ask “why” it had happened. Her parents' reticence, especially her mother's angry silence and vicious verbal attacks, were experienced as judgements upon her, feeding her guilty self-accusations. Caught in a web of mutual protection and self-protection, Cathy remains voiceless, never fully facing her loss.

Deep fault permeates her life. Try as she may, she cannot shake it off. She cannot speak to anyone about her guilt. It is only when she goes for counselling that she is able to say for the first time how guilty she feels and realises the lingering, relentless impact of this emotion. She is beginning to authentically "work through" the whole matter as she grasps the subtle but pervasive relationship between her sense of guilt and blame and her pain in knowing that, in her mother's affections, her brother was always first.

From early childhood, long before her brother's death, Cathy painfully sensed her mother's alienating resentment towards her and felt confused by her harshness. Her father's restraining injunctions that Cathy keep quiet to maintain family peace, also perplexed her. Later on light was shed upon her mother's resentment and her father's protectiveness. The loss of their son was a repeat agony. During her pregnancy with Cathy, her mother had lost a three-year-old child. Her parents suffered a second loss, an infant, when Cathy was two years old. Tucked between these two "ghosts" Cathy was unable to get close to her mother. Since her mother deliberately withheld the basic information that Cathy had had siblings and that they were lost through death, Cathy could never understand her mother's harsh, resentful behaviour. Knowing that it was at least partly motivated by loss that had not been mourned, mitigated, but did not erase the destructive effects on Cathy's confidence and self-worth.

After the death of her son, her mother's anger and resentment intensified. She would persistently comment that Cathy's brother was "like-her-family", whereas Cathy "was-not-like-her-family". These invidious comparisons exacerbated Cathy's guilt and sense of loneliness and alienation. Thus, in the face of the death of her brother that was a loss in itself, a loss compounded by the fact that she felt responsible for it, Cathy also had to endure her mother's wrath. Insanely in grief over her son's death, extremely possessive of her husband, Cathy's mother lashed out at her like a "boxer hits at something". Or worse, with what felt like vicious hatred.

The realisation that her mother's emotional instability stemmed from unresolved grief over the loss of three children evoked some compassion. Sorrow had gone amok even before it began to abate. Nevertheless, Cathy will always remember fighting a lonely battle in the dark against an unknown enemy. And she knows deep down that when death takes a child, the mother's reaction towards her surviving child(ren) is even more important than how the sibling feels about the lost brother or sister. In fact, her mother used her as a target at which she unleashed her pain and rage. Cathy turned into an indispensable "outsider", a much-needed castaway. This "position predicament" stripped her of the very freedom to "be" herself (to ex-ist). Her mother's ambivalence swallowed her up even as she distanced herself from her. It turned into a strange dialectic. She was a "nobody" who was the "only" one who could affirm her mother as "mother" but she was not the child that her mother wanted. It is the kind of dialectic that could precipitate madness. Cathy kept herself sane by clinging to the tender

idea that perhaps her mother lived in constant fear that she would lose Cathy, her only remaining child, to death as well. The sad truth is that her mother never once openly expressed such a fear. Cathy focuses her regret upon the lack of supportive or grief counselling at the time of the very first loss, an intervention that might have changed her story altogether.

As Triangles are wont to do within families, they wound and they offer respite. Although Cathy's father also lost three children, he remained a sensible and consistent person and handled the loss very differently to her mother. Cathy and her father had a silent pact of mutual understanding, one that sheltered her suffering and guaranteed support, security and stability. It enabled Cathy to endure the difficult, indeed 'crazy' period after her brother's death. Her father's presence was more real than her agonising hope for her mother's love.

After three years, Cathy follows her initial decision to leave home. Her realisation that she cannot take away her parents' pain and the conviction that for her own physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing she needs to move away from the heavy atmosphere that permeates her parental home, facilitates the separation. Yet, she does not for a moment consider that she will escape the pain of the loss and its impact on her and her family. Although she no longer has to witness her parents' grief in her day-to-day living, the emotional holding on continues and all the emotions that she experienced at home go with her as if she had "packed them" into her "suitcase". Until today she still holds on to the painful memories and carries a parcel of her brother's belongings that remains unopened, and which travels with her wherever she goes. She did not run away from emotional "baggage" associated with pain, loss and death; she simply left the package unwrapped.

In retrospect, Cathy realises that the question triggered by her brother's death and dominating her life has been: who-owned-the-grief? The meta-message coming to her from family and others has been that her parents lost their son. It was *their* pain and their sorrow, especially her mother's. It was the parent-child and not the brother-sister relationship that mattered. Her loss was never acknowledged. She was not entitled to grieve. So Cathy never gave herself permission to cry or to feel sad. It was fault enough that she was still alive. In the face of her parents' devastating loss, there was no room for her to sorrow as well. She was excluded from the grief as if her loss were invisible and her pain non-existent. At least it was never acknowledged by her parents. Rationally she understands that perhaps they were too preoccupied to notice her, absorbed in their own sorrow over the multiplicity of losses. Emotionally though she cannot fully forgive her mother for adding to her pain.

In time, Cathy comes to realise that searching for reasons for her mother's irrational behaviour is futile and she recognises that in order to move on with her life, she has to let go of the negative feelings (anger, hurt and guilt) that she held onto. While she is able to let go of the hurt and pain and moves

ambivalently towards accepting that the relationship simply existed as such, she still blames herself for her brother's accident. She remains acutely aware of the negative impact that her mother's reactions have had on her own confidence and self-worth. However, while she retains anger towards her mother for her lack of sensitivity, the anger is later transformed positively into a heightened awareness of the needs of bereaved children. Cathy is gradually able to integrate this into her lived experience of the loss of her brother as she passionately champions the cause of these "forgotten" mourners. However, she holds on to the sadness and self-blame, unable fully to confront the pain of her own loss.

TABLE III
Participant 2: Dia

Situated Narrative Description :
"Hidden Sorrow"

In speaking about the loss of her sister, Dia places the experience within the context of the sibling relationship. She recalls that from an early age she and her elder sister were very different. As children, what she remembers best is her sister's voice: indecisive, timid, constantly seeking affirmation as she addressed Dia by her pet name. Dia is aware that, because of the passage of time, her memories may be exaggerated. Yet her sister's remembered voice elicits strong memories, highlighting their personality differences: her sister fearful, not prepared to take risks, conforming, enjoying the safety of the familiar; Dia more adventurous, bold and, therefore, more likely to land in trouble. Dia often became impatient with her sister's apparent helplessness, suspecting and almost intuitively knowing that her sister was not as fragile as she appeared. As a child and young woman, her sister's actions frequently reflected an underlying strength which contradicted the apparent weakness conveyed by her voice; something which her parents and grandmother were unaware of because her sister was small and delicate and gave the impression that she was weak.

Yet Dia felt no resentment towards her sister. The only conflict between them arose when she tried to curb Dia's daring, and, in her sister's eyes, "irresponsible", behaviour. Dia realised that they were playing certain roles (weak/strong; fearful/ fearless; etc.) and she often deliberately provoked her sister. It was fun for her to watch her more responsible elder sister panicking. These roles met their needs in a mutually satisfying way: if it was dark Dia felt that she had to walk with her sister but she realised that it was just as much her own choice as it was her sister's. This (constructive) dialectic gave her sister the privilege-of-being-scared and satisfied her immediate security needs; while Dia felt that she was "proving something" and affirmed her identity as separate from her sister's. Although Dia realises that she was also afraid, their identities were so interwoven that she gave up the option of being afraid or weak and became the "tough" one - her sister's counterpart. Even with the trauma of her sister's sudden and premature death, Dia could not allow herself the "privilege" of revealing her feelings: could not acknowledge her vulnerability, admit that she could not cope or openly yield to her grief. She veiled her feelings; expressed her hidden sorrow only after she was married (3 years after the loss).

Although Dia and her sister consistently shared the same space, she felt that they never became real friends ("pals") because of their differences and the four-year plus age gap. In addition, Dia's family bonded very closely with their extended family. Thus she and her sister always played with cousins of similar age, her sister with the older children and Dia with the "little ones". Yet her sister was very

much an integral part of her world. So much so that after her sister's death Dia realises that: "... she has *grown* in my mind!"

Her sister married a young man who was well known to the family and to the extended family and whose personality was very similar to Dia's. Although Dia generally got on well with her sister's husband, they also clashed openly because he upheld some of the conservative views of the time; views which Dia found unacceptable.

Prior to the accident her sister had spent some time with Dia and her parents before her husband joined them for a few days at the sea. Then they separated again for the journey home. Her sister had been married only one and a half years and, after having time together as a family, the parting was experienced as yet another separation. Driving at a distance behind her sister and brother-in-law, Dia and her parents were flagged down by an oncoming motorist who informed them of the accident. The family was shocked by the dreadful news. They suspected that her brother-in-law had fallen asleep at the wheel. Knowing her sister's tendency to panic in a crisis, Dia silently considered the possibility that *she* may have grabbed the steering wheel as the car left the road. Her sister was killed instantly. Her husband suffered serious injuries.

Driving to the mortuary to identify her sister's body, Dia was deeply aware of how devastating this was for her parents. They spent a long time at the mortuary and Dia remembers with warmth and appreciation the presence of a young man who made an effort to stay and talk with her for a long time. She felt particularly grateful that he did not try to offer easy consolation. Thereafter they drove to the hospital since Dia and her parents were also concerned about her sister's husband. The family's life was suspended as they waited at Casualties for information about his condition/chances of survival. They were then joined by his family and stayed near the hospital until he was off the danger list. Then only did they resume their journey home.

Although Dia was included in all the arrangements after her sister's death, no one spoke about their feelings. Her mother was not a very talkative person and her father was more intuitive than analytical so that feelings were felt rather than analysed. Dia was greatly relieved that nobody asked her how she felt about the loss. She would not have been able to talk about it at that stage.

The funeral was awful for her. She regretted that her brother-in-law had not recovered sufficiently to attend his wife's funeral. More particularly Dia was distressed by her parents' grief. But, she could at least withdraw ("cut out") because there were people, friends and family, who supported her parents. She is aware that because of her personality it was difficult for her to acknowledge her feelings, to admit that she could not cope or to immediately express her grief. She needed time to be alone, to

reflect, and sort things out in her mind (cognitively). She could not risk breaking down. Implicitly this was not the way she knew herself or the way others perceived her. Only once she felt in control could she talk about what had happened. Before that, people must "please" leave her alone. Later Dia in fact asked them to do so. Although she spoke to a close friend on the telephone a few times immediately after her sister's death, she was reticent with others. Emotional trust was difficult for her and she could not share her grief even with her boyfriend. Implicitly she could not trust herself to cope with her intense emotions, feared breaking down completely, and consequently veiled her grief and carried on as "normal".

After the funeral, her parents' grief had the most significant and powerful effect on her. Dia realised that they did not have the energy to cope and she experienced this as a "demand" to-be-with-them-in-their-suffering. Needing time to be alone, she resisted being drawn into the family grief. She felt tremendous relief in the knowledge that her parents had a close and very supportive social network that allowed her to withdraw and to deal with her loss privately. Significantly, her father, whom she loved dearly, her ally who always supported her, was the one person who threatened her emotional equilibrium. She dreaded his persistent attempts to draw her out to talk about her inner feelings and sought to evade discussion. Inner conflict arose as Dia became angry and impatient with her father while simultaneously feeling deep compassion for him. Having to complete an academic task (thesis) enabled Dia legitimately to close her door against the "storm outside" and gave her the space and time to reconnect with herself. In retrospect, she realises that it would have been terrible if the family constellation had been different - if, for example, there had been a younger sibling - as Dia would have had to assume responsibility for this sibling and she would inevitably have been sucked into the family grief. Something that she desperately wanted to avoid.

From the outset, Dia and her family were embraced by helpful community. A close friend who had also lost a sister provided her with valuable support (more through mutual understanding than by talking about the death and loss). Her parents had adequate external support, enabling Dia to distance herself from her parents' sorrow. This was very important to her and she felt that having time to be alone was her "salvation". She especially valued the support of one of her mother's friends with whom she had a special relationship (a "mother-idol"). This woman made herself available as soon as she had news of the death: driving down to be with the family; physically being there and doing/acting rather than simply talking about the loss. Through this person's presence and her repeated actions, Dia learned the meaning of unconditional friendship and realised its significance in her loss experience. Dia's own friends and her sister's friends were also caring and involved, but Dia realised that they were all at a stage in their lives where they had other priorities (weddings; studies to complete, etc.) and she did not expect a great deal of support from them. Implicitly she felt relieved that they did not

have time to focus on her loss and she was able to withdraw and deal with her grief in a way that she felt most comfortable - through private reflection.

For a long time, Dia's greatest dis-ease arose from the way her parents handled the loss. Although she recognised that her sister had many lovable qualities, Dia experienced her parents' tendency to idealise her sister as foolish and as bordering on "idolatry". She was annoyed by their "twisting of the facts" because her sister was no longer there. Eventually Dia confronted them with the truth: "You are remembering incorrectly!". Later they became more realistic. Dia also experienced some discomfort because of her parents' habitual visits to the cemetery and she soon withdrew from this ritual. She preferred to hold on to her remembered image of her sister and found it meaningless to visit a "stone". Adding to her distress was the fact that, after the initial shock, her parents grieved differently - her father wanted to talk incessantly about the loss while her mother preferred to deal with her feelings privately. Dia realised that these differences caused some damage, albeit slight, to her parents' relationship. Dia would rather have handled her grief as her mother did but she felt caught between the two: implicitly by siding with the one she would be betraying the other. She felt that her father wanted to "expose" the sorrow but that she and her mother were not ready for such "exposure". Although Dia accepted that this was her father's way of coping with his grief, these differences created considerable conflict and, for her, became the most difficult part of the loss experience. The dialectic, exposing-concealing, also meant that her parents were unable to support each other and she felt the responsibility of almost having to "carry" them.

Anniversary dates (birth and death) were religiously observed by her parents and Dia realised that if she failed to acknowledge and/or celebrate these special occasions with her parents, relationships became strained and uncomfortable. Although Dia always remembered these anniversaries, her need to spend such days quietly on her own was unacceptable. Emotionally she felt bound by unwritten family rules ("laws"), even after she left home, to commemorate these special occasions with her parents. To this day, even after her father's death, the feeling remains the same: there is no explanation for her absence that can soften her mother's hurt and Dia continues to respond to the expectation that she be there for her mother. As a mother herself, Dia has often wondered how she would have handled the loss of her child.

Later when her nephews died, Dia observed that the two families coped with their loss very differently. She realises that the surviving sibling's experience of the loss depends largely on the parents' personalities and on how they cope with their grief. Although Dia feels that the way in which a sibling grieves is an individual matter, she realises that other members in the family have their own needs and characteristic ways of coping. In her situation, this placed immediate and repeated demands on her to cope with the loss in the same way as her parents did. She experienced this as doubly

stressful. It became even more taxing than the fact that she had suffered a loss. While Dia perceived her parents as very reasonable ("civilised") people, she subjectively experienced their grief as a subtle demand from which she could not turn away. She realises that it would have been easier if there had been other siblings who would have intuitively understood and shared that responsibility of, "Let us help mom and dad cope".

For Dia, separating from her parents became an extremely traumatic experience. She felt bound by her parents' vulnerability and struggled emotionally to give herself permission to leave home. Restrained by her ambivalent feelings, she could not bring herself to say, "Now I am going!" It was also socially unacceptable at that time for a young lady to live on her own but, more importantly, she was concerned about her parents' reaction. They would not understand her need to leave home. Her fears were confirmed. Her parents blamed each other for driving her away, clearly not understanding Dia's needs. For her parents "leaving home" was a foreign concept. Her elder sister had followed traditional social/family expectations, staying at home until she married. Dia realised that she was breaking new ground. Her anxiety was amplified because as the only surviving child she became her parents' sole focus. She felt suffocated but she was also aware that they could not come to terms with their loss and that their needs were greater than their understanding of her situation. Dia in fact continued to live at home even after she started working. Her first break from home came sixteen months after the death when she and her friend decided to travel overseas. By this stage Dia, stifled by her parents' intensified clinging, wanted to escape. But she knew that, for them, this separation would probably be terrifying - no fixed addresses; no real contact for three months. She realised that her need to spread her wings would have been less of a wrench if she had not been the only surviving child. On her return from overseas, Dia finally overcame her fear and trepidation and succeeded in moving into her own apartment.

Dia's loss experience had echoes that reverberated, encompassing others. Despite their differences, her brother-in-law was a friend and she felt for his loss. Because he could not be present at the funeral Dia sensed that he experienced difficulties in coming to terms with his loss; he could not reach "closure". Later we hear that he re-married twice and that his third wife looked strikingly like Dia's sister. The family never ever blamed her sister's husband for the death and maintained contact with him even after he remarried. Although Dia's father, who was very emotional, could have accused him of: "not looking after her well enough", her mother, who was more logical and realised that he cared about their daughter very much, insisted that under no circumstances should any blame be apportioned to him. Indeed her mother felt that for him the loss was worse than for anyone else. Dia herself never blamed her brother-in-law. She knew that he loved her sister dearly and would have done everything he could to protect her. She sensed how devastating it was for him and, after the funeral, she often visited her brother-in-law who was bedridden for a long time. Although the reason for the visits was

to assist him with physiotherapy, she was aware that for him the value of these visits was the opportunity to talk. Psychic healing (grief) rather than physical healing became the main focus. This task was particularly formidable for Dia who preferred to keep her grief hidden. She could not confront her pain immediately for fear of breaking down completely, yet she experienced a deep sense of responsibility almost to have to support him emotionally as well. While she does not perceive herself as a victim weighed down by responsibility, Dia realises that witnessing the struggle of others around her added to her pain.

Although Dia's first encounter with the death of a loved one (her grandfather) was painful, she feels that a sudden death of a young person is even more traumatic than death after a lengthy illness. The unexpected loss of her sister left her with severe anticipatory anxiety when travelling to the sea by car. Only this year (i.e. 30 years later) has she been able to overcome her fear but even so, she still associates travelling on the highway with having an accident and takes the necessary safety precautions. Paradoxically she is more relaxed when travelling in town.

Although Dia and her sister did not have a strong bond nor did they trust each other fully, Dia started to miss her sister when planning her own marriage (more as a helper than as a friend). She regretted the absence of a supportive sisterly relationship and realised that, despite their differences which meant that they were unlikely to share much, they would still have been there for each other. However, Dia is also aware that her image of her sister remained frozen at the time when she died and she realises that their relationship would have evolved and changed. She often wondered what her world would have been like with her sister: once she had children; when their parents got older; etc. She recognises the dialectical paradox that it could have been easier and more difficult; positives and negatives. Caring for elderly parents would have been easier if her sister had been there. Her sister might have provided better support for her mother after her father's death because her sister and mother were much closer to each other. However, there might have been more conflict than support between Dia's family and that of her sister. Nevertheless, the missing is still deeply and mysteriously felt. Dia gradually becomes aware of an increasing anxiousness at being left entirely alone at some stage in her life. She realises that a spouse is not family. He can choose to be there or not. But a sister (like one's child) *must* be there whether she feels like it or not. Implicitly the sibling relationship is a significant and infinite one.

Later on, Dia's developing relationship with her daughter fills the lack (gap) created by the loss of her sister. In the relationship with her daughter, Dia experiences the sisterly bond that she yearned for. Her daughter naturally grew into the sisterly role: closeness, sharing a lot, similar in some ways but also very different. However, Dia's awareness that her daughter could become a replacement for her sister generated some anxiety, especially when her daughter wanted to pursue the same field of

interest as her deceased aunt. Ambivalent feelings arose as Dia was aware that her daughter was very talented in this field but, simultaneously, she feared that she might have influenced her daughter's choice. Dia actively discouraged her daughter from following the same career as that of her deceased aunt. It was only on her daughter's firm insistence that Dia relented and allowed her to pursue her interest, satisfied that this was *her* wish and not Dia's own need to resurrect her sister.

A lingering and intense feeling for Dia was that the wrong sister had died and she frequently questioned: "Why her and not me?" Although she realises that her own death would have been painful for the family, Dia argued that her existence was relatively unimportant at that stage of her life: she was unmarried, unsure of her career direction, and not in a serious relationship. By comparison, her sister's life was more rooted and intertwined with that of many other people. Her sister's loss was, therefore, more poignant and more deeply mourned - that is the way Dia perceived it. Adding to her feeling that her own death would have been less traumatic for everybody was an implicit sense that her sister was the "special" child who could do no wrong: grandmother's refrain, "She was not made for this world"; mother's conviction that Dia was always at fault, "Because I know my children well!"; Dia's own feeling that her sister was more successful; that she would have provided better support for her mother. Although Dia did not really feel guilty, she felt strongly that if she had had the choice she would have planned it differently; *she*, not her sister should have died.

For a long time Dia felt extremely angry with God for allowing such a wrong and unnecessary thing to happen, for creating havoc and pain in the lives of so many people. At some point she realises, with relief, that she *can* be angry with God provided she does not turn away from Him. She confronts God and demands answers. The realisation that she could say directly to Him, "I am angry. Help me sort it out!", came after a long personal struggle and after that Dia felt that she was able to cope. She is aware that this would not have been a solution if it had come from anybody else. Indeed Dia was appalled by the abstract and extremely emotional ideas of others who attempted to console her with a lot of "religious talk". For her the loss was a lived reality, a painful "given". Attempting to persuade her otherwise was not helpful. Dia's loss experience precipitated an awareness of the difference between the unquestioning acceptance of the ready-made incantations of organised religion and the harsh and concrete reality of being-with-loss. She questions previously held religious assumptions. The story of Job - God as the Ultimate Planner - strikes a chord in her because of her passion for planning. The insight that there are better plans than she can visualise or conceptualise enables her to find new meaning and to entrust God with the planning of her life.

Over the years, Dia also found comfort in certain situations. Negatively, she could often console herself with the thought that, because of her sister's personality (small and delicate), she would not have coped well with the more difficult aspects of life. Positively, she realised and also found comfort

in the thought that her sister had not been deprived of the joy of marriage and that she had, in effect, enjoyed the best part of her life. Dia realised that after that only difficulties lay ahead. Later, Dia also observed certain interactions between her brother-in-law and his second wife that made her aware that he could be a hard, difficult and dominating man. Had he treated her sister in a similar way, Dia felt certain that she (Dia) would not have kept quiet (she would have protected her sister). At such times her sorrowful mood would be replaced by one of quiet acceptance: "perhaps it was better"/ "for the best". Implicitly by focusing on memories of her sister and their relationship in the past (their differences; that they did not share much; her sister's vulnerability; etc.) and projecting these into present situations, Dia manages to soften, almost minimise, her own loss and her sister's loss. However, this consolation vanishes as she realises that just as her own personality had changed a great deal, so her sister's personality would also have changed over the years. Their relationship would have developed. She realises that "one seeks these things"; but recognises that they had indeed both suffered a significant loss.

It was three years after the loss, within the intimacy of her own marriage, before Dia was able to cry for the first time and could say to her husband: "It was *terrible* for me!" Only then does she feel free to openly acknowledge and express her own grief. After that, she felt that she could cope. She trusted her husband emotionally. She knew that he would not become upset by her grief and also knew that she could reveal as much, or as little, as she wanted to without fear that he would insist that she disclose more. Implicitly, because her husband was outside her loss he would not be affected in the same way as she was, would be prepared to listen without imposing *his* interpretation on the loss.

TABLE III

Participant 3: Elena

Situated Narrative Description :

"Frozen Images and Immobilised Existence"

The call changed her life. Two and a half-years previously Elena, then a young student of twenty two, was studying for her final university exams. Her cousin's voice at the other end of the line was calm and deliberate: something had happened to Elena's brother. She should stay at home; they were on their way to her. Elena was alarmed but her cousin deflected her urgent questions. She immediately realised that something serious had happened. Anxiously she tried to contact her brother's friends who had accompanied him on a bike run that day, but she realised that they had switched off their phones. Finally, Elena arrived at the terrible truth: her brother was dead; killed instantly in a motorcycle accident.

Her immediate thought was of her parents, particularly of her mother. She realised that they had to be told. Somebody had to say: "Tom is dead!" In the awareness that there was no going back (no way of rescuing her brother this time as she had done in the past), and also realising that the extended family could not bring themselves to tell her parents, Elena immediately went to them and in her usual candid manner broke the awful news. Guilty as the bearer of dreadful news, delivered abruptly, Elena realised that there was no gentle way to convey the finality of death.

From the moment of voicing this truth, Elena's whole world changes radically. The death is a "hole in their hearts", in the very life of the family. Her brother - twenty-five years old; young, full of energy and "life-hungry" - was a central life force in the family. The home reverberated with his vitality. He was her mother's special child ("soft spot"). He also played a pivotal role in the family businesses. With the loss, Elena becomes aware of an emotional and physical emptiness. Their lives feel empty; their existence totally transformed. The gaping void persists; more keen at special times of the year, but always there. Elena realises that going away to a different location does not help.

In the awareness of the gap created by her brother's death, Elena put aside her own career and took over her brother's business. Although this was a major disruption in her life, she felt that in some way she was still "doing something for him". She realises that she was also doing this for her parents. She felt the need to support them; could not let the family fall apart. She immersed herself in her deceased brother's work. His life and her life merged. Implicitly she was not only living his un-lived life for him and maintaining her role as his caretaker (filling in, covering up for him in his absence) as she had always done when he was still alive, but she was also preserving what remained of her family.

Elena feels no anger about her brother's death. While she is aware of her brother's weaknesses (fast driving; fast-living), weaknesses that ultimately led to his death, for her his life was a "success story". He had changed a lot towards the end of his life, ultimately becoming a more caring and contented person - something which others also noticed. Did he have a presentiment that he was going to die? Before the loss, Elena would become angry with her brother and they fought a lot because of his persistent demands. But their conflicts were short-lived. The sibling bond prevailed. And now she feels no anger - she simply misses him. His hunger-for-life takes on new meaning and she finds some solace in the thought that although his life was cut short, her brother had truly lived his allotted span to the full. His death was almost "heroic", giving meaning to his life in a good way without Elena needing to deal with the ambiguities of the past.

For Elena, the pain and the missing linger on. After two and a half years, she still yearns for her brother and thinks constantly of him. She is aware not only of the loss in the present but she also recognises the loss of future relationships and possibilities (when she gets married; has children; etc.). She looks to the future with sorrow because her brother cannot physically be there for important events in her passage through life. Yet she also holds on to the hope that she will one day be reunited with her brother in the afterlife.

What she hates most about the loss is the erosion of age; the relentless passage of time. Memories of her brother will start to dim. She fears that a time will come when she will not be able to remember his smile or the tone of his voice. The awful encroachment of distance saddens her. In time, inevitably she will lose touch with her brother. She realises that she will lack the capacity to visualise him as being older. She will continue to age, but his image will remain frozen at the age at which he died. At present she is still able to connect with him as she is also young and she remembers him well. She fears that as she grows older she will lose him completely, fears that in the more distant future, not only the person but also the relationship will be lost. She sets about very deliberately to remember him in as much detail as possible and holds on to the memories of her brother; feels that she must remember; that she cannot forget.

The image of her brother's face, as she remembers it when the family goes to identify his body, is indelibly imprinted in her mind. The accident left his face undamaged and unmarked. She had never seen him looking as good as he appeared on that day. Always a good-looking young man, he was now more than handsome: beautiful, peaceful, almost serene. But he was cold and lifeless. The stark fact, the finality of death shocks Elena. As the reality hits home, her wretchedness blends with the miserable day's cloudy, drizzly weather ... an indelible imprint of weeping, in seemingly cosmic empathy.

At his funeral, Elena felt comforted by the impressive number of people that attended the service. She had never seen the church so full. Others confirmed this. She realises that despite her brother's mischievous and somewhat reckless behaviour, he was greatly loved. Although she was aware of her brother's weaknesses, as his sister she knew that deep down he was a good person. It became clear to her that he was very popular, that he had touched the lives of many people. This public affirmation of her brother's underlying goodness enables Elena to remember him with pride; in a good way.

The worst part of the loss experience for Elena is witnessing her parents' bereavement. She is acutely aware that the loss has changed her parents. They are simply not the people that they were before the loss. It is a double wound: the changes that she has undergone; and the radical transformation of her parents. Although Elena realises that she cannot possibly understand the intensity of a mother's pain, she lives in the shadow of maternal sorrow. And so the family grief pervades her being: constantly, unremittingly, she "lives", "breathes", and "eats" it. She is under no illusions that her eldest brother is also hurting, but she feels that it is different for him. He has some respite when he goes back to his own home whereas, living at home, Elena is totally immersed in the grief-laden atmosphere.

Her parents grieve differently. Her mother will weep, speak to her husband, or do whatever she feels will forward her mourning; her father holds on to his inner pain, is not as open about it. Yet, Elena senses her father's silent grief and also feels his deep sorrow. She knows that the loss has struck at his very core; he is his son. Elena resists the changes in her parents; they magnify the pain of her own struggles. Without blaming them for the way they have become, she does not accept what she witnesses. Catching a glimpse of her mother as she knew her, seeing her laugh, giggle or simply talk as she used to do, fills Elena with joy and hope as she realises that her mother is able to reconnect with her pre-loss self; that she can survive the loss.

Elena experiences the loss and the accompanying grief as a fight, a constant inner emotional struggle as she vacillates between facing the pain or struggling against it. Although time has dulled the acute edge of the pain of her recent loss, still, it is an ongoing emotional battle. She is not sure whether she has blocked her feelings or dealt with them. Just facing the loss, or struggling against it, is equally difficult. It affects her entire being. Her emotional struggle is reflected in a physically experiential manner (hair loss, weight loss, a general malaise) and she realises that mind and body cannot be separated: if one feels ill at ease emotionally, this is manifested in one's physical being; in one's appearance.

The struggle extends to her faith and Elena becomes aware of changes in her relationship with God. Before the loss, she had been sure of her religious beliefs but rock-solid convictions became chipped. Distance, rather than anger or hatred, marks her feelings toward God. She has withdrawn from Him;

not wilfully or rebelliously but because she has lost the sense of His presence. Elena becomes aware that she has changed and is unhappy about the way she has become. While more recently she has started to draw closer to God again, she continues to grapple with her feelings, attempting to make sense of these changes. On reflection, she thinks that she may be disappointed in God, perhaps feels some disillusionment with Him. Her shaken faith, and a sometimes absent God, distress her but as a Christian she accepts the Lord's mysterious ways. She recognises that she needs more time to work through this distance-closeness dimension, to re-establish a bond with God but realises that this requires work: it is a labour.

In the face of the emotional shock and the upheaval in the family, and in an attempt to maintain the former closeness of the family unit, Elena's immediate response is to-be-strong-for her parents (particularly for her mother); to be there for them as much as possible. Her parents' immobilisation at the loss of their son hammers at her consciousness. She has to sustain them and help them through it. She tries to be stronger than she actually feels. Elena surprises herself by her seemingly incredible strength. Yet deep down she feels extremely weak and her body reflects this reality. Although, like her mother, Elena also feels like "stopping life" she realises that withdrawal is not an option. If she collapses the family will fall apart. She senses her mother's immeasurable pain and, in comparison, her own grief pales into insignificance. Strange, but meaningful: her mother never openly enquires about Elena's feelings. Equally meaningful, Elena maintains the silence in the belief that consistently being there for her mother, caring for her needs, renders words unnecessary. So Elena puts aside her grief and continues with life as "normal". Her strength, she believes, must have been sent by God. Later she realises that she has indeed become a stronger person, able to cope with a lot more than she did before the loss.

From the outset, the burden of responsibility for her parents weighed heavily on Elena: from informing them of the death, to helping them through the funeral, to being-there-for-them as much as possible afterwards. Elena enjoyed an overseas holiday; a break away from home. Although the extended family there asked many questions about her brother and Elena did not block the loss, she realises that talking about her brother's death with others outside the immediate family is different. Not having to face her parents' grief is like a weight off her shoulders. Coming back home meant coming back to the heaviness and the pain. Her parents remain frozen in their grief and Elena begins to feel as if there is almost no movement in her own mourning. Their grief seems an inescapable, heavy responsibility. She remains steadfast in her care and support. Yet a curious dialectic grinds on: despite her care, their persistent grief makes her question her adequacy and she cannot perceive a light at the end of the tunnel.

Elena keeps busy and hides the inner pain that is constantly with her. In addition to the need to be strong for her parents, she is aware that by nature she is inclined to conceal her feelings, to share deeper emotions with only one or two really close friends. In this extreme situation though, she puts on a *façade*; conceals the truth even from her friends. While internally she experiences deep sorrow, her behaviour is not authentically lived but socially determined. She is aware that this deception confuses her friends and puts them in an awkward position. They feel inept; not knowing what to say but prepared to listen. Well-meaning, they encourage her to talk about the loss whenever she feels the need but she maintains the silence and the pretence of "normality". In time, Elena becomes aware that she is not her usual self. She realises that she has become more reticent since the loss, "harder", less likely to allow others into her personal space. She has been changed by the loss.

Apart from her own reticence, Elena is also aware that others feel uncomfortable with death and this contributes to her reluctance to share her deeper feelings. Thus, if she experiences the need to talk, she restricts herself to unemotional comments about her brother to spare her friends any embarrassment. Existential awkwardness lingers as she attempts to deal alone with her loss.

Elena feels distressed that she was unable to cry; could not grieve openly for her brother. She questions whether she was trying to be "strong enough" for her parents but realises that her mother had encouraged, even pleaded with her, to give vent to her grief. She herself is aware that crying is not a sign of weakness. Yet she would not, could not weep. Even when she was alone, she could not cry in any sustained manner. This confuses her. Paradoxically, before her brother's death the tears flowed easily; Elena was not a stranger to crying. The slightest conflict with a boyfriend reduced her to tears. But with her brother's death she remained dry-eyed. Although Elena remains confused, she realises that her inability to weep for her brother was not simply an attempt to be strong. Implicitly the feelings related to her brother's death cut deeper; the emotions too overwhelming for tears. What is the place of tears in a situation, especially within a family structure, that is so complex?

While Elena avoided talking about the loss and about her feelings, she derived great joy from listening to "real stories" about her brother as related to her soon after the death by his close friends: what he did; what he said; how he helped others. Because of his zest for life, her brother seldom spent time with the family. The stories as related by others provided a window to the other-side of her brother. Elena latched on to these "happy" narratives and non-shared experiences. They enabled her to hold on to her brother for longer, to remember him more fully. Implicitly, as long as she could hear about him, in some way her brother was still out-there. The stories filled the gaps in the narrative of his life. Listening to others' lived experiences with her brother was a journey of discovery and gave an added dimension to her perception of him. She heard of his caring, helpfulness, generosity, how he had touched the lives of others, and she felt proud of him. However, in time, Elena found it extremely

difficult to initiate discussions with his friends on this level. She realises that when they see her they immediately associate her with their lost friend and their obvious pain silences her even further.

Because her brother was so much a part of her world, Elena discovers that she has assimilated many of his sayings and mannerisms. She is delighted but rather perplexed by a strongly felt sense of her brother-in-her. The way she has incorporated him into her is evident to others, particularly to his friends. She feels as though her brother left her a rich legacy; his “magic” and energy. She loved these traits so much that, not surprisingly, she wants to hold on to them throughout her life. Saying something exactly as her brother would have said it fills her with joy as it reminds her of him and brings a smile to her lips. Her strong identification with her brother enables her to maintain the link to her deceased sibling and to preserve their relationship -- just as the family retain the ties by keeping his belongings intact. Until now, however, nothing has eradicated Elena's fear that in time she will forget his unique way of being and this fills her with deep sorrow.

Reviewing life with her brother, Elena is aware that, with the passage of time, their relationship had changed. Ambivalence characterised it when she was a little girl. They would fight; and he would derive enjoyment from teasing her (his "little sister") and making her cry. Although he was only three years older than Elena, she felt powerless in his company. Later, he forbade her even to speak to his friends. In fact in early and middle childhood, Elena felt much closer to her eldest brother. However, there was never major sibling conflict and for quite a few years before her brother's death, she felt equally close to both her brothers.

As they grew older the gap between them seemed to narrow: she could approach him with a problem; they would occasionally go out together. But their relationship was not without conflict. They fought a lot and did not speak to each other for days, even for weeks. But loyalty and the brotherly/sisterly affection always prevailed. As an adolescent and young adult Elena often angrily resisted her brother's requests for help but would soften and assist him time and again. She had a sentimental affection for him and could not deny him anything - "he got away with murder sometimes". If she could not curb his risky behaviour, then as a loyal sibling she would at least protect him. She became his protector-caretaker: filling in and covering up for him, and if things went wrong, she would pick up the "pieces". She did all this without her brother's knowledge and without expecting anything in return. It was devotion, pure and simple.

Although Elena and her brother never openly expressed their affection for each other, she sensed her brother's love for her. It was only after his death, however, that she realised the depth of his affection for her - not only for what she did for him but also for who she was. Through the remarks of others in whom he had confided, she became aware of the extent of his esteem for her. She learned that he

respected her highly and would have done anything for her. His affirmation of her worth meant the world to Elena and she continues to hold on to the many meanings that her brother had for her.

With the loss of her brother, Elena becomes aware of the fragility of life. She fears death because she has experienced what death is; experienced it firsthand. Although prior to her loss, the death of a young person existed as a possibility (her mother's greatest fear was that she would lose a child; others spoke of premonitions that they would not live to be old), Elena had never seriously considered this. Death had not touched her personally. Death was part of the natural order of life - old people died. Now, after her brother's death, she questions her taken-for-granted attitude towards family relationships. She begins to treasure these relationships, no longer assuming that because they have always been there, they will be there forever. She now knows differently. Life can end at any time. She regrets that she did not spend more time with her brother. She fears losing her parents and others close to her. This is not a pervasive anxiety and does not extend to a fear of her own death/mortality. But she has become more appreciative of time spent with family members and significant others.

Elena experiences her loss as intensely painful, more painful than any other loss (grandmother), that she has experienced, and she withdraws both in her behaviour and in her attitude from reminders of the death. The place of the graveyard becomes taboo. Unlike her mother who goes to the cemetery religiously every weekend, Elena experiences a strong aversion to visiting her brother's grave. She prefers to remember him alive, to hold on to his magic and his energy, rather than to visit the cemetery. For her it is difficult to reconcile his lived image (as reflected in photographs); his intense vitality, with seeing his name on the tombstone...a "slap in the face", obvious, loss-confirming-death-reminder. She evades the dreadful fact of death and holds on to living images of her brother.

Her desire is to remember her brother with joy and not with pain. Elena feels really pleased that she can still view her brother in a positive light, can share a story about him; remember him with warmth and delight. Unlike her mother who remains locked in her grief, Elena wants to remember her brother as the happy and vital person that he always was. She recognises the ambiguity of her emotions because his memory does evoke pain but she is determined that the painful associations with her brother: accident-tragedy-death, should never overshadow the positive associations in her mind of his vitality and the meaning that his life had for her and for others. Implicitly the fact that he died should not take on more importance than the fact that he lived. She resists the negativity of her mother's pain and holds on to these positive images.

More than two years after the death, Elena finally reclaims herself; reconnects with her own career goals and tentatively begins to walk the path that she had initially chosen - but not without some inner conflict. In her decision to pursue her own career, Elena considers her parents' needs and attempts to guard against her decision being self-centred. She feels divided. On the one hand, she experiences the

wanting-to-do-something-purely-for-herself almost as a selfish act; on the other hand, she accepts that she can follow her own path without feeling that she is somehow betraying her deceased brother, or her family, by doing so. She realises that no matter how close she is to her brother, she is separate, and that she owes it to herself to develop further in a field for which she has qualified, and that she finds more stimulating. Elena is aware that if she does not do this, she might regret it later. This provides the impetus for her to move on.

However, the longing for her deceased sibling persists. For Elena, the ultimate happiness would be to be with her brother once again. Although she questions the existence of an afterlife, she holds on to the hope that she will be reunited with him sometime in the future. This provides some comfort and enables her to continue with life without sliding into despair.

6.4 The Findings

The intense experience of losing a sibling through death is a series of over-lapping and criss-crossing stories that are separate from each other, yet also related. Telling these requires more than a single monograph; it demands a book. I have chosen to use five brief "chapters". I start by keeping as close as possible to everyday language, in order to unfold the bigger picture; the comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Differential analysis-synthesis, expressed in the language of psychological science, will follow. Using two languages is necessary to convey more fully what it means for a sibling to lose a sibling:

- 1) one language as close as possible to everyday speech in the life-world of the participants, giving a voice and credence to this loss experience with all its relational nuances; and
- 2) the other, social scientific language and philosophical terminology which will address the theoretical and academic dialogue surrounding sibling loss.

In terms of the use of everyday language, using the second person aims at drawing the reader into the immediacy of the lived experience of losing a sibling. As co-participant, your understanding of what it is like to lose a brother or sister may be deepened, broadened. Hopefully it may even touch you personally and enhance your awareness of the significance and impact of this unique loss experience.

Human experience *per se*, but especially the loss of any significant person, and in this case sibling loss, is a process that evolves over time. We can distinguish moments within the temporal process, hooks which the participants used to structure what was a temporal and existential turmoil, a mishmash of conflicted, contradictory emotions. Loss through death is a complex experience and does not usually follow a well-ordered progression. However, in the experience of the loss of a young adult sibling, the participants' emotions were especially chaotic. Although their descriptions were

temporally organised in terms of a "Before the loss", "At the time of the loss", "After the funeral" and a "Later", there were a variety of inner and external forces which seemed to shape the experience and that were so interwoven as to be almost inseparable. There was also an ebb and flow with the past, present and future and there were dimensions of the experience that did not fit easily into any specific category. Yet as the experience unfolded five distinct *moments* emerged that remained invariant throughout the interviews and which revealed the experience and disclosed its general psychological structure. These include:

- # 1. Adumbration of the loss: Context for the unique nature of sibling loss;
- # 2. Normal grief: The pain of loss;
- # 3. Parents' Bereavement: A "Sickness unto Death";
- # 4. Inner and Outer Silencing: A "Cipher in the Dark";
- # 5. Reclaiming the Self: The long journey.

As for the participants, so also for the researcher, the temporal moments are fluid. For both, a structure can be described which is like a series of snapshots, frozen frames that focus on moments of a process and allow us to adjust what is otherwise a blur so that it can be analysed. The frames are not absolute; they are also not arbitrary.

6.4.1 General Structural Narrative

The following five chapters differentiate the unique texture of sibling loss from other experiences of loss through death. Each chapter is a "moment" of one structural whole: a sibling-loses-a-sibling.

1: Adumbration of the Loss: Context for the Unique Nature of Sibling Loss

Before the loss your life continues routinely within the network of parental and sibling relationships. Growing up with your sibling has not always been easy or smooth. As a little child you played with your sibling and laughed together but you also knew how to provoke, annoy and irritate each other. You cried when he or she teased you and you derived great enjoyment from watching him or her panic when you did something daring or irresponsible. You fought a lot but you also protected, and were there for each other.

The age gap between you and your individual differences created a distance, a separateness. You became polar opposites complementing each other: "compliant"/fiercely "independent"; "fearful"/"fearless"; "selfish"/"considerate"; etc. Parents noticed these differences and responded to them; even unwittingly encouraging and reinforcing them. For reasons unknown to you, they treated you differently to your sibling. Tacitly you understood that this "other" was precious to your mother ... and to your father. Not that it was obvious. Not that they did not love you. But it was *there*. You

sensed this, and may even have felt hurt by it. Yet living together, you knew your brother/sister better than anybody else and felt mysteriously bound to each other.

Later you both gravitated more towards same-age friends. Jealously you held onto your chosen friends, resisting any intrusion into this special relationship by a brother or sister. You entered high school or university and your sibling relationship slipped quietly into the background. But he or she was always *there*. You were never really alone.

Before the death you started to move closer to each other, discovering each other all over again. The gap between you seemed to narrow and you began to share more, discuss problems (real life issues), even occasionally go out together with friends. But you were not really “pals” yet. Possibly you realise that this will come later. Right now you are pursuing your own life projects and goals, readying yourself for the separation from your family and the sibling relationship does not occupy centre stage in your life.

2: Normal Grief: The Pain of Loss

But suddenly your life is shifted through 180 degrees. The unimaginable has happened. The “later” will never come. Your younger/elder brother/sister, a person so much a part of your world, your “other” self, your own flesh and blood - your childhood playmate/rival, companion/adversary, friend/foe, has died. The blow is enormous. It is like a hole in your heart, a veritable amputation of a limb from your family.

Your world is turned upside down and inside out. Before this you were aware of death, but *old people* died. Now death has taken a young vital person: a contemporary; almost a peer, someone from your own generation, from your own family line. Death has touched you personally, on the inside; visited you at home, and shaken your at-homeness in a way that no other experience has done.

The death is a shock. Everything feels distant, hazy and unreal. Inexplicable fear grips you as you try to absorb what has happened. You want to run away, escape the reality of the gaping void created by your sibling's death. You want to veil the transformed world brought about by this radical separation from someone who has-been-there since the *beginning* of “time”, and who you assumed would be there to the *end* of time - at least, to the end of your time. You shut down your feelings, not because you have no pain but because it is too hard to accept that this significant other will no longer be there. Temporarily you need to be numb. You require a barrier to dull your sorrow, a buffer zone within which you can catch a moment of respite.

Many thoughts and questions flash through your mind: "How will the family survive this loss?"; "Why her/him and not me?"; "Why did God allow this to happen?"; "Where is God now that I need Him?"; "Who am I?". There are moments when you fear that you are going insane. Life's wound evokes cognitive confusion and emotional turmoil. You feel the confusion, pain, anger and guilt of someone who has been severely wounded by life but cannot admit to your grief. The feelings are too overwhelming to be faced all at once. You might trigger an avalanche of emotions if you cried from the depths of your heart. You would have to really feel the pain of loss. If you started crying, you might not be able to stop. So, while you sometimes briefly let go a little, for *now* you hold on to your inner pain and keep your grief hidden. Only your body responds to the pain and yields to the reality of death and loss. Grief for the loss of this significant other, significant in more ways than you had ever thought, is inevitable.

3: Parents' Bereavement: A "Sickness Unto Death"

But you have your devastated parents to deal with. The death has touched you not only on the inside but also from the outside-in. Your thoughts turn immediately to them. It is *their child* that has died. Can there be a loss more poignant than that of a parent who has lost a child? Their grief is like a mountain that they cannot climb without support. You see it first when the dreadful news is announced, then at the funeral and especially later as you all try to return to normal day-to-day activities. Now, a protracted period of time after the burial, a host of emotions surface as you watch your parents flounder. You witness their sorrow, sense the persistent heaviness in the home.

Although they are mourning the same child, they grieve in different ways. You feel torn and frightened. You want to scream. You want to shake them out of their pain but then you also want to hold them tight and make their pain go away. But you cannot. No more than they could usher you into adulthood without pain. Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness come in waves. In some deeply significant way, with the death of their precious child, they have psychically died. You yourself are not acknowledged and yet paradoxically attention is focused on you. You become the only one that can fill the emptiness created by the loss of their beloved child; perhaps the only one that can coax them into a world of new beginnings and new life. You sense the responsibility and cannot turn away.

Dimly you realise, however, that no matter what healing might take place, the family will never be the same again. For your parents it has been a phenomenological death of self. For them their worst fears have been realised. The most unnatural of disasters has been visited on them: they have outlived the child that they welcomed into the world, cradled, raised and, in one form or another, have let go of. But *this* "letting go" is unimaginable. A *part* of each of them was buried with your dead sibling. Now everything of him or her is *gone* and yet a *part* of them still "lives" on ... everything has fallen *a-part*.

From the point of view of *now*, it does not seem possible that they are going to let go. Not this time. This time they are going to cling with all their might. There can be no easy or premature mourning of this death that has struck at the very heart of life. They will resist any easy sliding of meaning into the zone of the "forgotten". You are stuck with their refusal, a refusal that entraps and binds you.

Even if some healing takes place; edges towards resolution and then tentatively moves towards acceptance, from now on everything will be different. If the day should ever come when they finally might be able to see the sun breaking through the clouds, it will be such joy, a veritable miracle. But for now, a dark hole, unable to be thoroughly filled, will remain - a cold, hard fact of life. There is nothing that you can do to change this.

You see all of this. Not all at once or all the time, but you *feel* it incessantly. In response, your emotions shoot out. Sometimes, focused, they flash in a ray of anger, irritation, frustration. Most of the time you are filled with compassion, feel the guilt of the "survivor". Your emotions swirl rapidly around as in a whirlpool, then, sucked back to the centre, they proliferate and reappear later with even greater force. Even if you tried, you could not capture one single emotion in order to put a label to it. Only away from them can you feel some respite but, paradoxically, all the emotions go with you. You realise that from these relationships, and from their grief, there is no escape. You must be there. You experience a poignant imperative. You cannot turn away from the instinctive need to be there for them. Nothing in you is programmed to let go. It is a "work", an accomplishment, which must begin afresh, this time not in a natural, gradual way but more determinedly, forcefully; more painfully and traumatically.

4: Inner and Outer silencing: A “Cipher in the Dark”

And you still have your own individual pain to bear. Whatever your parents are feeling, or whatever pain is carried by your dead sibling's spouse, child, lover, friend, their loss is recognised as a more *direct* blow. They have lost a child, a wife/husband, a father/mother, a lover, a friend. Has the cruel blow dealt to you been softened in any way by these significant others who took the more direct knock? Your mind-body screams: 'No!' Yet your grief seems like a molehill. It doesn't even have a geography that can be identified on the map. In the broader picture of things, your grief does not count for much. Out-side of you, your grief does not even exist.

It is only within your own experience, within your own consciousness, that it is *real*. Although your heart is breaking for your "gone"/"lost" childhood companion; although "gone" for you are your parents in their old sense; although “gone” is also a part of your *self*, still in this predicament, no one even notices you. You are an "outsider-onlooker". You are a cipher occupying a vacant/vacated space in the complex equation of all these relationships.

Henceforth, your alienation is complete. You are surrounded by people, but you feel alone. Your grief becomes a personal and private matter. You need the space to sort out your own emotions but you also cannot upset or hurt others who are already swamped with painful emotions. You cannot embarrass friends who, although well meaning, are not comfortable with death and grief. You keep yourself busy and maintain a façade of “normality” while inside you the hurt, sadness and missing lingers on. What you feel inside and what you show outside are very different. Sorrow and living memories of your dead sibling become your constant companions, keeping the past alive and the terror of absolute loneliness at bay.

5. Reclaiming the Self: The Long Journey.

It is only much later that you are able to break through the silence and self alienation, give in to your pain, enter the emptiness and truly mourn your loss. It is only much later that you are able to relieve yourself of the burden of your grief by *openly* sharing with someone (a husband/wife, therapist, or significant other outside your deep sorrow) something of the tormenting emotions and the trauma of your loss experience. Still the fear of death and loss of significant others follows you like a shadow through life. It fills you with deep anxiety while simultaneously making you more deeply aware that *relationship* is the most essential part of life - whether it is the relationship with parents, brothers or sisters, friends, or with God. With all the intensity of a heart that *knows*, you realise that life is short and that every moment with a loved one must be treasured.

Without consciously working at reorganising your sense of self, you realise that you have been changed by the experience - that you have assimilated many of the qualities that you originally thought belonged exclusively to your sibling. Now you recognise in your “I-ness” both strength and vulnerability, fearlessness and fearfulness, that you can be responsible and sometimes daring, independent and also compliant, considerate as well as selfish.

You are on your way to "working through" the loss when you stop fighting death and the changes that it has brought about in your world. When you can let go of the anger, guilt and hurt and live your life without feeling that you are betraying your parents or your deceased sibling by doing so; when you manage to reconcile the past with the present and begin to face the future once again.

But with all of this you remain constantly aware that nothing can take away the pain of your sibling's physical absence in this world and that ultimately, because of this loss, you will have to confront the terror of absolute loneliness in later life (particularly as an only child).

6.4.2 General Psychological Structure

I will now elucidate, break down, the ideas inherent in the above five chapters. Then I will put it back together again and present a structural synthesis of the general phenomenological psychological description of the experience of sibling loss.

It is important to keep in mind that the death of a member of a family impacts on every other member. It is essentially a *relational* phenomenon and cannot be divorced from the family and the wider social context. In the lived experience, the loss of a sibling and the loss of a child are closely intertwined, overlap, and frequently tumble into each other. They cannot be viewed as absolutely distinct but as interwoven as the following structure reveals.

In order to demonstrate the psychological insights gained from the individual experiences of losing a brother or sister through death, examples from the naïve descriptions will be cited that support the general themes to be discussed.

1. Sibling loss is a transformative experience and grief over the loss is long-lasting.

The loss of a brother or sister reveals itself as a profound and lasting transformation of existence and the impact of the grief over the loss is long-lasting. Because their lives are intimately connected to their deceased sibling, and are also closely intertwined with that of their parents, the participants experience their lives as being permanently changed by the loss. Everything that is familiar changes. With the loss, the surviving sibling's earlier way of existence is shattered and the survivor continues on life's journey without someone who has been part of her world from early childhood and who, under normal circumstances, would have been part of her world until old age.

In the present study not all the participants were at the same place in their journey. Elena is still in the relatively early stages of her loss experience and although she is tentatively moving on with her life, the intense longing for her lost brother is still powerfully present. But even for the respondents whose loss occurred many years ago, the journey is ongoing and the primacy and trauma of the experience is still present. In moving through her profoundly painful experience, Cathy has succeeded in reconciling herself to the fact of the death and has let go of the pain of her mother's hurtful and alienating behaviour following the loss but she continues to struggle to confront the full reality of the loss and the meaning that her brother's death has for *her*. Dia has also been through the struggle, has reflected deeply on her loss experience and has moved on with her life but emotionally she still feels bound by unspoken rules to maintain the family oneness and to spend all special occasions with her parents.

- *Sibling loss is a transformative experience:*

Elena (19/20/65): "Ja, and from there...my mother's *never* been the same person; my father's never...our *lives* have never been the same. We're just not the same people, you know. It...it changes you a lot...I've become a lot harder...generally in life"; "...religion-wise it's changed me. I used to be a lot more religious..."; "I'm more closed now than I was before. I don't let people into my space easily...like personal space".

Cathy (56/61): "I think it has [strengthened me]. I hope it has made me a nicer person and not embittered me like it did to my mother"; "...and *that* I think is a very, very important aspect of [the loss]...the mother's reaction towards...the children that stay behind. *That* perhaps is even more important than how the child feels about the loss. To me, I think it meant...because it became an abnormal situation."

- *The impact of the loss is long-lasting*

Cathy (1/33/41): [Thirty-nine years after the loss] " It feels as though it just happened yesterday ..."; "...and going back to how I feel about (the loss)...I still grieve about him as he was when he died...a young man, you know, and he was a very good-looking young man..."; "I also have a little parcel of his with...with his watch and...but I've never opened it. It's still there, it's still closed. I move with it wherever I go and..and..you know...as I say, *running ... running ...*"

Dia (18/34): "After that, for me...for a very long time, it was terrible the way my parents handled it" (the loss); " Still today there are unwritten rules that we will, more often than not, be together on Christmas (Day)... To tell the truth, I have spent only two Christmases away from my parents...there's no explanation as to why you are not available...why you would do your own thing, that would make it 'softer' (easier) for them".

Elena (9) "...I know even up to today...the pain is still there..."

2. The loss of a sibling shakes the sense of wholeness, rootedness and at-homeness.

Before the loss of their sibling the participants' existence continued routinely within the network of parental and sibling relationships. A sense of belonging; of wholeness, rootedness and at-homeness allowed the participants to face the world and to move into the future. Although the primary parental bonds and early sibling attachments did not always or consistently provide a secure sense of being protected and of being "held", nevertheless, they were always there and the support and affirmation from one or other family member offered the necessary respite, affirmation and security.

As young adults their lives started to go off in different directions to that of their siblings, and their brothers and sisters did not consistently occupy centre stage in their lives. Yet siblings were *there*, an integral part of their world and symbolically still in the "same boat" as they moved through the various transitions in their lives. Even with their age differences, and the hierarchy in the family (eldest, middle child, youngest), the sibling relationship was more or less egalitarian. While an elder/younger brother or sister may have held a special place in the family, in the relationship with the sibling the core identities were revealed and they were both still subject to the struggles that all humans face. The participants became impatient, angry and annoyed with their siblings but their differences frequently co-existed with an underlying affection for, and loyalty towards, each other.

Despite the conflict which characterised their early relationship: their individual differences, the age gap and the established family alliances ("favourite child"; "mother's child"; "father's child") which in some instances separated them and sometimes seemed to keep conflicts alive, as they matured their relationship started to change once again. By young adulthood, sibling rivalries and the competitiveness of early childhood had diminished and a more egalitarian relationship emerged. Most of the participants felt that the gap between them and their sibling had narrowed. Cathy and Elena both began to move closer to their siblings and a different kind of relating (although still a fluctuating and ambivalent one) started to emerge before the death. Although Dia's relationship with her sister remained polarised and they had not yet reached the closeness that she witnessed between her friends and their sisters, she and her sister still maintained close contact with each other and she assumed that there would be greater closeness and more sharing in the future.

- *Affirmation and support from one or other family member offered respite and security:*

Cathy (31/73): "...She (i.e. mother) was a very hard woman...she was always very, very hard on me...never on my brother...it was a strange thing..."; "I had a terrific relationship with him (i.e. father)...if it wasn't for him I think I would have...it was very, very trying after my brother died".

Dia (58): "...He (i.e. father) was a lovable person...the day when he died I realised...that the one person who *un-con-di-tio-nally* always...you know, it is the stupidist thing...would always take my side and look for excuses for me, is no longer there (laughs). My mother would...um ... first sort everything out...first find out whose fault it was...always think I was at fault, "because I know my children well!..."

Elena (35/36): "...he (i.e. brother) loved me a lot for what...okay, obviously for [who] I was, but also for what I did for him..."; "...he respected me a lot and that...means the world to me".

- *Feelings of sameness and difference in the sibling relationship created a sense of wholeness:*

Cathy (49): "...You know he was there. He was there at supper and we [both] got into serious trouble if we weren't home in time for afternoon tea, you know. "

Dia (1/2): "...You know that was the difference between the personalities. I was much more daring...she would not take chances... So she had the privilege of being afraid; I did not because I am a loud mouth...I pretended that I was not scared. So if it was dark, I had to walk with her, you see, but it was my choice just as much as it was hers. So there is no resentment if I say this. Not at all. I almost want to laugh about it (laughs)...I realise we...had certain roles...I thought I was proving something and she...well she enjoyed the safety which naturally was very important to her...we were small then..."

Elena (52/35): " Ja (yes), I was always covering up for him...I was always...picking up [the] pieces and like covering up for him...I just did it...I'd always let him go and get away with murder sometimes..."; "...every time he'd ask me for something, I'd tell him, 'This is the last time I'm doing it! ... and the next time he asked me, I'd do it again... That's the kind of soft spot I had for him, and I would always tell him, 'No! I'm not going to do it!' and...ah! ... we used to fight a lot as well, you know. Not speak to each other for like... (laughs)...like a week or something (laughs) and then, ah, it was fine ...ja...it was fine."

- *The closeness-distance dimension of the sibling bond fluctuated over time:*

Cathy (43/48/49) : " ... And yet he was much younger than I was [5yrs]. We were never ... just about a year before he died, we started to become friends...On looking back, we had very little in common. We did very little together..."; "...I think my mother was always very protective of him and she sort of kept...each one had his own little world, you know..."; "I can't remember...ever being really close...until he grew to a young man...until he was about 17/18 then we started chatting and...and I started picking him up wherever he was in the afternoon in the car..."

Dia (40) : "...we were still too far apart at that age, that four/five years, and we were too different, that, she really was a pal to me. I realise that it would have come later."

Elena (51/53) : "...although when we were younger, with my oldest brother I was...we were much closer...I was *very* close to my oldest brother but...that changed...there wasn't...I don't think anyone was closer than anyone else for quite a few years before his death"; "...he loved to tease his little sister, you know. Especially when you're little...when you're younger...[2-3 years] it's like more of an age gap. I think lately it wasn't that much of an age gap. We'd go out more, you know, together, whereas before it's like, 'Don't speak to my friends!' and that";

3. With the loss, the self is confronted by a void that threatens to fragment self and family.

With their sibling's sudden death, the participants are ripped from the familiar order. An order which had to a large extent shaped their sense of self and oriented them both spatially and temporally in their lived world (eldest, youngest). They feel the pain of the gaping void created by this devastating loss. The emptiness persists, more keen at special times of the year but always *there*. The loss spreads and the participants live the very theme of loss. Physically leaving the place of suffering does not mitigate the pain. Their deceased sibling's absent "presence" is everywhere.

From the moment of the announcement of their sibling's death, everything changes. The participants' whole sense of being in the world and their perception of the world is shaken. Not only do they experience themselves in a new way but others around them are also altered. The whole context for relating changes and some participants experience a period of reduced functioning in the world and poor health following the death.

Interrelated roles and functions in the family are also disrupted and reorganisation is inevitable. The space that had been filled by the deceased sibling (mother's supporter; manager of the family business; etc.) is empty. Although not immediately apparent, roles and tasks, responsibilities and expectations shift, leaving the participants who had come to know themselves in a certain way within the family structure facing the question: "Who am I?". This was particularly difficult when the participant was left as an only child who was the only one that could fill the empty space. Dia who was the second child and who became an only child after the loss, was acutely aware that she was the only one that could take up her elder sister's role. She could not deal with this dramatic role change immediately. No longer able to enjoy the independence/freedom that she was accustomed to, she struggled to hold on to her familiar sense of self. Although Cathy, who had been the "eldest" (but second-born), was accustomed to taking responsibility within the family, she too struggled with the

role change of becoming the "only" child. Elena, who was the only one still living at home, also felt the weight of responsibility of the "only" child.

- *The world feels hollow and empty without the deceased sibling; evoking intense pain:*

Cathy (18) : "...and it became a weird existence because he was so much part and parcel of our lives yet none of us acknowledged him. We never spoke about him. You know...everyday...I mean we'd sit down to eat and we would all cry and no one would acknowledge why we were crying."

Elena (4/5/6) : "...He was...if he wasn't here at home, he was always talked of, you know. We'd like sit down if he wasn't here and we'd discuss Tom, you know. It was always about him and what he did...so when he was gone, it...it changed our lives totally. I think up to today, it's... ja, it's not nice"; "...Obviously Christmas and things like that are like...terrible...they're dreaded...ja...I think the last one we tried to go away from...the home because we always used to be here and stuff, but...um... also it doesn't work; "Ja, it's...a *hole* ...in our hearts, in our lives, in our..."

In some instances it was the emptiness of lost opportunity that created a gap and elicited pain:

Elena (37) : "You know they're always *there*...you take for granted that they're always *there* until...And I think...ja...I would have *loved* to have spent more time with him but I guess that's impossible..."

- *The loss is an embodied experience and some participants go through a period of reduced functioning in the world:*

Cathy (77/78) : "...But I do think there is a link between your health and sorrow"; "I think it became a very low...um...intellectual period; a period where I cannot remember anything happening. It was a stagnant period...um...[for] years... "

Elena (43/57) : "...I felt very weak, you know, like the way I looked. I'd lost a lot of weight, you know..."; "I know like...my entire like being...it's not been good...*as* good...I'm not looking as healthy, not been as healthy, what shall we call it...if you're not like psychologically fine, it like shows on you...and a lot of stress. I lost a lot of hair...initially".

- *Interrelated roles and functions in the family are also disrupted signifying a need to fill the gap:*

Dia (29/49) : "She was the elder sister with a sense of responsibility. Um...Which of course left me more *free*..."; (After the loss) "Because I was the only one that was left and I...half realised that their (i.e. parents') support for each other was not so good and I was for them...a sort of catalyst between them...for me it was...*terrible* to have to go and tell them that I wanted to move into a flat".

Elena (2/3) : "...I think him being...well very [involved]...he was very involved in the [family] businesses. I think on that side of things, it's taken a big knock...because of that emotional side. Because the last shop we opened was his...the shop was basically for him. So like *me* working in *that*, I did in a way for *him*..."; "...well...look, because it was obviously a great shock to us all...I felt I needed to help the family through it...like support the family...my mother..."

4. An emotional struggle characterised by ambiguous, paradoxical and confused emotions, evolves.

For the participants, the loss of their sibling set in motion a whirlpool of painful, bewildering, conflicting, and frightening emotions not unlike those experienced by others who suffer the loss to death of a loved one, but amplified by the acute awareness of their parents' intense grief. From the moment of getting news of the death until well after the funeral, the emotions, raw, fluid and shifting, came in waves. At times the feelings flooded the participants' consciousness, at other times they disappeared only to resurface again much later.

Thrown into unprepared mourning the participants initially felt shocked, dazed, numb, and distant. Temporarily they needed to be numb, to shut down their feelings, not because they had no pain but precisely because the feelings were too intense and confusing. Not all participants were numbed in the same way or to the same degree. Initially, Cathy was almost paralysed by her emotions and feelings of fear alternated with a strong sense of unreality and confusion that persisted for a long time. For Dia, the fear revolved around acknowledging her vulnerability, losing control of her emotions and breaking down completely; while Elena closed off her feelings and, realising that her parents were totally immobilised by their grief, immediately took control of practical arrangements. The shock, fear, and confusion were particularly severe and long-lasting when the participant was somehow involved in the circumstances of the death, or felt in some way responsible for what had happened (as in Cathy's situation). However, for all the participants, closing the self off from feelings meant that they could cope with the immediate demands while everything and everyone around them was collapsing.

All the participants felt that a sudden, unexpected death and particularly the death of a young person, was more traumatic and difficult to accept than that of an old person who had "lived his life". Thus, while the participants were cognitively aware that their sibling had died and understood the irreversibility of death, emotionally this reality could not be faced or accepted immediately. Attempts to avoid confronting the reality of what had happened, to evade the gap, to "withdraw", "run away", to "block" the painful emotions persisted even after viewing the body and attending the funeral. One way of containing the confused emotions was by keeping occupied. Holding on to familiar activities provided a buffer against the pain of loss. Feelings of helplessness were replaced by a sense of control over, and order in, their world and it is only in retrospect that the extent of the emotional struggle becomes apparent.

- *The emotional turmoil and cognitive confusion could not be dealt with immediately or all at once:*

Cathy (39/67) : "You know it is like a whirlpool of all kinds of things...and...after it sort of happened, little things would come up... They'd surface a bit and then they'd vanish in the water

again, that type of thing, and one's ability to cope later when they appear a little longer, you know, and before you suppress it again and hide whatever you're feeling... You can deal with it a little bit and then off it goes again...you close it up..."; "...death is such a tricky...and the sorrow that comes with it...it's many faceted. It isn't just sorrow...there's so many aspects to sorrow...it's like a whirlpool. Something comes up, then...whew! It's away. And then a few months later or a few years later, something else pops up and um..."

Dia (67) : "...because of the nature of my personality...I cannot cope...or I cannot *give in*... 'admit'... that's the word! I cannot *not* cope because as soon as I do this then I collapse completely...For a while I must...my mind must take over rather than my emotions. I mean I must think myself through this...come through this cognitively..."

Elena (70) : "...It was very difficult. I remember I wouldn't cry...at all. My mother like: 'Please cry'. I'd say, 'I can't. I cannot cry'. I don't know why, what, how...and if I did, I did for a little bit all by myself or maybe...on the *odd* occasion with a friend and for so short...I don't know. I *couldn't* and I don't know what it was...I don't know if it was being strong enough but it doesn't mean that you're not strong if you cry...but I just...I couldn't cry. I don't know why..."

- *Initially there was shock, fear, disbelief and confusion where closing self off from feelings provided some stability:*

Cathy (2/3/4) : "... And there was this absolute fear ... I didn't know what was going on ... there was this absolute disbelief, you know. You can't think..."; "And I sort of half-slept on this couch"; "...and eventually my mom and dad...arrived at the hospital and...I don't even know what time [it was] ... And from that moment everything became sort of hazy...It is as though the reality of what happened ... made me feel totally...um...out of touch."

Elena (26) : "...but...it's been a fight, a struggle, you know. It's an emotional fight, you know. You always try and ...block it...not...I won't say block...ja, in a way it might be blocking it. I don't know if I blocked it or dealt with it. I actually...still don't know to this day. I don't really know..."

- *Withdrawal and attempts to evade the pain of the reality of death persisted for a long time:*

Cathy (36/37) : "I think they left the coffin open in the church. I think it was done purposely so that the reality could hit us...And, I think, there it hit...home. That...*here he was!* ... that it's over...But still...I can still remember long after the funeral, waking up and thinking it definitely didn't happen, you know, that he's here...and then listening for the noises he used to make in the morning..."; "I think the pain of the whole situation: that it's a closed thing, there's no longer that person, you don't want to accept and you actually...you look ahead at the pain that is lying ahead, do you understand? ...and that not wanting to accept...that you think it hasn't happened...it couldn't have happened, so that you don't have to go through all that..."

Dia (10) : "Then we had the funeral and that...that was terrible! But my experience of that was that I could cut out. There were people who took responsibility for my parents...and, mercifully, I could then withdraw..."

- *Keeping occupied helped to contain the confused emotions:*

Dia (13/75) : "...But then I had to finish my thesis. So I had something that I needed to get to work on immediately which also, in a way, made it easier"; "...I could keep myself busy. I had an objective and you must please leave me alone because I am...busy...The door of my room was closed and they left me alone because I was busy...and I think in the process of finishing the thesis I...but I still found time for myself and the storm outside...uh...I didn't have to see it all..."

Elena (42) : "...I don't know, I felt...I felt really strong...I don't know how I did it, especially close to when it happened, because ...it was, 'I'll take it and I'll deal with it!' (i.e. brother's business)...from... [writing] my Honours exams...I didn't write the first one because it was a week

after his death, I wrote all the others and I passed them and then I went straight into the shop and then I just took it in my hands, 'Come I'll do it!', you know, because...obviously because of the emotional loss my parents couldn't deal with things..."

Although not expressed immediately, the participants experienced some anger following this radical transformation of their world. But it was not only anger, there was also fear and a sense of helplessness and deep hurt. There was anger at God, a certain disillusionment with Him for allowing such a terrible thing to happen; at parents for their tendency to idealise the deceased child, and frustration and fear that their parents' unremitting grief could destroy the one or other parent, shattering what remained of their family. The participants' angry protests were simultaneously efforts toward recovering the equilibrium, security and connectedness of their pre-loss existence and an attempt to make sense of their transformed world. In retrospect, and with deepened understanding, the anger and irritation melted into compassion as the participants realised that their parents could not get over the loss.

- *Feelings of anger erupted as fear and insecurity intensified:*

Cathy (23/65) : "Then they started going to the cemetery every Sunday. And it became an absolute ritual...eventually I couldn't stand the emotional strain...My father was losing weight, my mother was looking terrible and one day they came back and I said to my mother: 'This has got to stop! You're killing dad...you've got other things that you must look [to]...'"; "...I *am* angry with my mother. Her reaction and her insensitive behaviour towards me and I think that is why I never ever told her that I told him (brother) to use the car. Because as it was, I was *suffering* her behaviour and I could never... relate that..."

Dia (19/70) : "...It almost went to the point of idolatry, you know. So much so that at one point I said: 'You are remembering incorrectly!'...It just factually irritated me...the twisting of facts because that person was no longer there...it's too silly"; "And that was another thing... religion. Fortunately at one point I got as far as to realise that I *was* allowed to be angry. I could but then...I had to tell Him that. That was a great relief...[that] the...[One]...who...has the power has done the wrong thing and, therefore, I hate Him', and things like that...and those are things that I had to [work out] for myself...it also did not happen immediately...For a long time I felt: 'yes, I'm annoyed and it's a very stupid thing to let happen. It was unnecessary. Look at how many lives have been messed up and people who...' But for me it was a very, very big relief to realise that I may be angry as long as I could say *directly*, that: 'I am angry. Help me sort it out'".

- *With deepened understanding, anger and irritation melted into compassion; forgiveness:*

Cathy (53) : "...looking back I realise that it was emotional instability...I mean, you lose three children, you can't be absolutely normal can you? I don't think so and I think I experienced it...You *cannot*...but as she's grown older...let me tell you, she was hard until she was about eighty five. Only now between eighty-five and ninety has she mellowed and I think it was also her way of sorrowing."

Dia (24) : "At one stage I was irritated with my father because he threatened me in a way, in the sense that he...wanted to drag things out of me about which I did not want to speak...He wanted to talk about it and I didn't want to then...he created situations that were a threat to me. And I wanted to get away. And the more I wanted to...you know we both felt...Oh, shame! It was terrible. Shame! (expression of sympathy/care for parents). It was terribly bad for them..."

Elena (58) : "...and especially seeing your parents like that...you don't want to accept it like that...I don't want to accept them as they are...because...it *hurts* to see them like that...[it hurts] a lot. I don't blame them (i.e. parents) for it, you know. I don't blame anyone for anything ... it's like, no one *did* it, you know. It's just that's the way it's become, you know..."

6. In the awareness of the parents' profound grief, there is a desire to sustain them and prevent further fragmentation.

With the loss of a significant attachment and the feeling that everything that is familiar was slipping away, there was a powerful desire to sustain primary attachments and prevent further fragmentation. The participants were acutely aware of their parents' deep pain and without exception felt that their parents' grief was far more severe than their own. They acknowledged the closeness of the parent-child bond as an existential "given" and recognised that the severance of this bond demanded deep and profound mourning. As they witnessed their parents' intense pain, particularly that of their mother, their own grief paled into insignificance. In some sense the participants almost experienced a sense of relief that they did not have to live out such extreme suffering - the sorrow *particularly* of a mother who has lost her child.

In seeking to sustain their parents, the participants veiled their own grief, made few demands on their parents and attempted to shield/protect them from additional pain. Supporting them through this devastating loss, either through actively being there for them as much as possible or by ensuring that they had adequate external support, became their immediate goal.

Living at home and witnessing their parents' incredible hurt and the ways in which they had been changed, the participants felt totally overwhelmed. They became anxious that the family would not be able to survive this extreme loss experience. The shock of such profound and persistent suffering was not only frightening and confusing, but also added another dimension to the participant's lingering sadness, a fear of a further collapse of their already depleted world. With the death of their sibling they had lost a significant attachment, now they feared losing what remained of their family; losing all sense of rootedness and the last vestige of their brother or sister.

Their parents' grief was experienced as a poignant imperative; a heavy responsibility. They must be there for them. Although the participants reported that their parents did not overtly make any demands on them, yet they experienced their parents' pain as a *demand*, an appeal, from which they could not turn away. However, it was only retrospectively that they realised how incredibly stressful this sense of responsibility for their parents had been. Participants who after the death of their sibling were left as only children, felt even more bound by a sense of responsibility to be there for their parents.

However, persistent lingering in the parent-child relationship stood in opposition to the readiness to separate, was restrictive and delayed the natural developmental process.

- *There is an acute awareness of parent's pain and own grief is diminished by comparison:*

Cathy (68) : "If I look back as to how I feel about my brother's death...it was a great loss for my parents, not for me. They've lost a child..."

Dia (27) : "Very often, I have often wondered, if it were my child, how I would handle it".

Elena (68) : "And I'd hate to obviously like feel the intensity of my mother's pain, you know what I'm saying...um...Obviously when I have a child of my own then I'll understand what it would be like but..."

- *In the desire to protect and sustain parents, the self is put aside:*

Cathy (17/22) : "Ja, and then when the funeral was over and we tried to get back into normal life... I tried to protect them from songs that he (i.e. deceased brother) was very fond of, you know."; "...I was at home and I stayed at home. I made a pact that I would stay with them for three years... and I stayed for three years and tried to protect them."

Elena (21) : "...and I tried to feel stronger...especially for my parents...because...I guess I love my family a lot, you know. We are very close ...I've tried to be there for them as much as I can, you know."

- *With the threat of further fragmentation, fear and insecurity intensify:*

Cathy (25) : "You see...I myself was feeling terribly...I was scared for what was happening to them...seeing them deteriorating. I couldn't understand what was going on because it (i.e. the grief) just continued and continued..."

Dia (15) : "...I think my parents, for me, were the greatest [concern]"

Elena (39) : "Ja, I think the worst part for me is to see my...my parents like this, you know...it like hurts me and it upsets me, you know, because it's...ugh! ... it's just not the same people, you know, and it's just really sad...it's really, really sad...it feels like I've lost my...not *lost* my family but, it's ja, definitely changed us in many ways...Ja, ag!"

- *Feeling responsible for parents connotes a poignant imperative:*

Dia (56/61) : "...I felt, you know, now, in a way, I must carry these people (parents). They did not have the energy really to...I did not ask [for] much ... I actually asked them to leave me alone, you know..."; "...And it places *demands* on you...and I assume that if there are more children, then the children could half *understand* each other, you know, and almost jointly bear the ...thing of: 'Let-us-help-mom-and-dad-cope'...but it did place demands on *me*."

Elena (61/62) : "It was nice on holiday...although I spoke *about* him a *lot*, you know...it wasn't as if...I went there and I just blocked him off... He was very much a part of that...but...I think maybe not dealing with my parents, you know, it was like...like a *weight* off my shoulders"; "Although I don't mind doing it and I do it with the greatest of ... [very willingly] but it is...a... responsibility ...they really do not ask for anything...[but] you know.. Like I'm me. I just want to [help]...if I can..."

- *Lingering in the primary relationship impedes personal growth and movement in own grief:*

Cathy (72/75) : "...I perceived it as a mother that is over-possessive. That's how I felt about it. She never gave me freedom to express opinions or express ideas..."; "...only these last few years that I

felt...I am free of...to a certain extent confined...whole thing put on me...As though I'm starting to be my own person, not...trying to be someone else's person..."

Dia (32/34/63) : " They definitely did not understand why I wanted to leave home and it was *terribly, terribly* traumatic for me to say this...to get myself so far as to say, 'Now I am going!'; "I just wanted to get away a little from the clinging because the holding on became more intense ..."; "Still today there are unwritten rules that we will, more often than not, be together on Christmas. To tell the truth, I have only spent two Christmases away from my parents ...My father is now deceased but...it is the same feeling of...there's no explanation as to why you are not available, why you would like to do your own thing, that would make it [easier] softer for them".

Elena (60) : "...You go [away], you stay for a while and you come back [home] to exactly the same thing...even though you might talk about it (i.e. the loss) and deal with it, it's almost like you have to come back to the exact same thing..."

Not only was it painful to live each day with their loss and in the shadow of the family loss but their parents also sorrowed differently. For some, conflicting feelings arose as they witnessed the tension in their parents' relationship and realised that they were unable to support each other which added to their fear and insecurity, while for others, parents' divergent ways of coping with the loss offered some respite:

- *Parents' divergent ways of coping with the loss dialectically offers respite and intensifies the stress:*

Cathy (72/73/74) : "...she (i.e. mother) was totally irrational...At times she was normal and other times she was totally irrational"; "She became vicious. I think she used me as a sort of a hitting...like a boxer hits at something and she could verbally hit. It was very destructive that's all I know..."; "...and my father was fully aware that there was this but we never really discussed [it]. I knew that he knew and that made me feel safe, you know...the fact that he was aware of it...and he'd wink at me or...he'd, you know, he'd try..."

Dia (21/22/23) : "...and they also handled it very differently, the two of them, which for me was also very...noticeable and which I think, did some damage to their relationship...My father wanted to speak about it continuously...and my mother wanted to keep it very private..."; "I realised that I would have to...that I would rather handle it like my mother did than like my father"; "So there was a conflict which was a little difficult. It was actually...it is... I mean it is both their needs and they had an equal right to deal with it in their way but then there was no support for each other...that was the most difficult of the whole..."

Elena (38) : "Ja, my father is also taking it a bit...he's obviously not as forward as my mom. My mother like...she'll express it more and she'll cry and she'll talk to him more or whatever she, you know, she feels helps her. My father is more quiet about it. It's also hit him hard..."

Participants also differed from their parents in ways of dealing with certain aspects of the grief situation and conflicting feelings arose. Unlike their parents, all the participants experienced a strong aversion to visiting the cemetery and preferred to hold on to living memories of their brother or sister. While Elena recognised that her reluctance to visit the cemetery was an avoidance of death-reminders, for others it was their parents' pain that they wanted to escape from and they withdrew from this ritual:

- *Conflicting feelings were present in respect of grief rituals:*

Cathy (23) : "Then they (i.e. her parents) started to go to the cemetery every Sunday. And it became an absolute ritual...They'd both go off. Sometimes I'd go with...eventually I couldn't stand the emotional strain and they'd go off and they'd come back ..."

Dia (20) : "...and then those terrible regular visits to the cemetery...I very quickly said: 'No thank you!...I will remember her in my mind. I am not going to a *stone*!' You know, that sort of attitude. Terrible! It was very difficult to cope with."

Elena (44/45) : "And I hate going to his grave...I don't see the point of it...I don't want to associate a graveyard or anything with him. I think he was too happy a soul to...to associate *that* [with him] and...I really don't like it. I don't go...I'm hardly involved... Ja, I'll go...like five times a year maybe, or six, but I don't like it. I'd rather look at a photo...I hate to see his name on that cross. I think that's ugh!...I don't know, I guess it hits you in the face, but I don't like it"; "You see my mom is totally different. She loves to go. Every weekend she'll... flowers and the whole thing. Ja...just different..."

Not only did the participants feel their parents' anguish and experience themselves in a different way but their parents also started to relate to them differently. A different relationship was shared.

Participants experienced their parents' attention being focussed on them and yet they felt that they themselves were not acknowledged or noticed. This closeness-distance dialectic was particularly traumatic and confusing when the parents had experienced previous losses as in Cathy's situation:

- *The dialectic of increased parental attention and (benign) neglect:*

Cathy (72) : "I experienced the attention being on me. Ja, my mother's total absorption with me ... but not my father. My father was a sensible man. I mean he also lost three children. But my mother became totally absorbed in...It became a...I don't know. I often thought [that] perhaps she was fearful that something would happen to me but she never expressed it..."

Yet, despite the intensified attention of her mother, Cathy painfully recalls the lack of acknowledgement of her place in the grieving family and of the recognition of her relationship to her brother:

Cathy (64/69) : "I don't think that the parents even realise that the child also has pain..."; "Do you know that on my brother's gravestone...(very emotional - long pause)...on my brother's gravestone...(weeping bitterly) ...I've *never, ever* said this...on my brother's gravestone, it says... "Our Son". I was there shortly after he died when we were washing the gravestone and I saw then, "Our Son" and I put it away, you know. Just filed it away...and it has just come up now..."

Dia, on the other hand, recognised the ambiguity of wanting to be alone while simultaneously needing to feel connected:

Dia (33) : "...They literally *smothered* me, you know. I did not have a chance to breathe because *then* I was the only focus."
And yet:

Dia (77) : "...I...look, I don't say that they were not interested in what I was doing...that's how I experienced it. Perhaps *I pushed them away*...perhaps they got the message loud and clear: 'don't bother me', I don't know. We never really spoke about it...[but]...for me the greatest help was that I had time, that I was not, you know, sucked in [to the parents' grief]. That would have been terrible."

6. "Guilt" and the struggle to retain a weighted sense of self in relation to the lost sibling.

The loss triggered not only an awareness of their deeply entrenched emotional ties to their deceased brother or sister and his/her embeddedness within the family but, as the participants attempted to cope with their fragmented lives, they also struggled to retain a sense of self-worth in relation to the deceased sibling who, within the family, was remembered in idealised terms and whose image remained "frozen" at the time of death. In the process of reintegrating a sense of self in the absence of the fluctuating and vibrant relationship with their brother or sister, they compared themselves with the remembered image of their deceased sibling and in most instances found themselves lacking.

With the loss, the tacit understanding that the deceased sibling was the most cherished or special child became thematic. The intuitive sense that their sibling was more precious was strengthened not only by their parents' profound mourning, their preoccupation with their lost child and their tendency to idealise him or her, but also by the participants' own perception that the deceased sibling was the favourite, or so they assumed because this was never openly discussed with their parents. Only in one instance (Cathy) was this directly stated by her mother and this totally devastated Cathy, leaving her struggling for years to establish an independent sense of her own worth from an abandoned position.

With the tremendous loss and the incredible emptiness that threatened to overwhelm them and their parents, a sense of "guilt" emerged and some participants struggled with these emotions for years after the death. However, this was not simply guilt but an acute awareness of the significance of their sibling in their lives and in the lives of significant others. There was guilt for not taking enough care of their sibling; for being alive when the sibling had died; for not spending enough time with the sibling; for not being "good enough" to care for parents; and for wanting to separate from parents while realising that they desperately needed support. As they struggled to cope with their own fallible human existence and the fragmented lives of those around them, some participants questioned their right to exist. Dia doubted the adequacy of her support for her mother following her father's death and felt strongly that the *wrong* child had died. For Cathy, the sense of guilt arose from feelings of being-to-blame for her sibling's death and was amplified by the knowledge that her brother was her mother's favourite child, thus negating even her entitlement to feel sad; to be "sorrowful". Dia and Elena both experienced deep regret for the lost potential for greater closeness and sharing in the future.

- *Struggle to maintain an independent sense of self-worth in the absent "presence" of the deceased sibling:*

Cathy (24/52) : " But she (i.e. mother) developed a sort of a...after I was born I think she had resentment towards me and it came out even [more] after my brother died and I think that made me...feel even more guilty that my brother had died, you know. That she had lost the one that she was fondest of...that she became very peculiar"; "...and she said, 'I just want to tell you my *favourite* child died! (very emotional; wept bitterly)...You know, when you're in a situation you don't realise that's just her way of hitting back...at her pain...I think that it was devastating ...it was hurtful...for many years I thought I had no worth".

Dia (43) : "Last Monday I had an idea that my sister would have supported her (i.e. mother following father's death) far *better* because they were much *closer* to each other in a way. But still, I don't know if she [my mother] would have experienced it like that ... I don't know. Must ask her! Funny, we don't speak about such things..."

- *Awareness of guilt for not having fully appreciated the sibling in life:*

Cathy (28/29) : "...he was driving my mother's car. There was a lot of guilt I had in that as well because the evening that we went out he was going to go to his girlfriend by bus and I said: 'No!' and I got angry, 'We've got to go to the station and you've got to take us', and because he took the car, he had the accident and *that* caused me guilt for *years*"; "That I worked through...but...I mean, I never told my parents so I haven't worked through that to that extent, you know. I think there is still a lot of guilt wrapped up in him having been in the car".

Elena (37) : "You know they're always *there*...you take for granted that they're always there until ... and I think...ja, I would have loved to have spent more time with him but I guess that's impossible ... but I would have really loved to have spent more time with him...Just so difficult, you know, life gets so busy...and you don't spend as much time with each other as you should...there is not really much family time, you know...it's a lot...'got to work, got to work!'"

- *In the "ghostly" presence of the deceased sibling, feelings of doubt and existential guilt intensify:*

Dia (69) : "You know that I always said...and I definitely felt it...I honestly felt: 'Why not...why *her* and not *me*?' I mean I was not in a relationship. I was not married. I was almost *disposable* at that stage because it wouldn't have been so bad for everybody...what I mean is that they would have felt bad for a time, you know...But I really felt...if I ever felt in the least bit guilty, I felt guilty because it was not me. Because she had just got married, just qualified...it would simply have been logical...I wouldn't say that I really felt guilty...but I know that I had such thoughts...which...if I had to make the plans, I would have made them like this...you know"

Cathy (68) : "... I don't think...I ever acknowledged that I had the right to cry...or I had [the right] to feel sorry for [myself]...because I was *alive*, do you understand? Here I am alive, how can I feel sad? They must feel sad because they've lost...a child...and I think after it happened I went into that hazy world of...you're not allowed to be sorrowful because you're alive and it's their child that died not yours. Do you understand?"

7. A conspiracy of silence contains and conceals the grief.

With the shock and the tremendous pain of the loss, participants initially were unable to share their feelings with anyone. For the participants talking to parents about feelings had not been easy at the best of times. As they witnessed their parents' intense pain conversation became even more difficult, sometimes was highly emotional and was avoided. Some participants felt that words could not suffice to mitigate the pain of such a devastating loss, others feared that whatever they may say could be misunderstood, or experienced as accusatory and hurtful. Caught in the web of silence and the circle of protection and self-protection, the participants maintained the silence. While inside they were

hurting and sad, on the outside they put on a façade and continued with life as "normal". Whatever bonds, whatever conflicts they may have experienced, or whatever secrets they may have shared with their siblings, were sealed off from the outside world. Acknowledging the truth brought the pain. In their relationship to the world their grief did not exist. Only within their own consciousness was their loss real.

Later, open discussion about their feelings was difficult for different reasons: a lack of acknowledgement that they too were hurting; participants preferred to deal with their emotions privately; fear of letting the suffering in and being overwhelmed by the family grief; and the need to protect themselves, their parents and significant others from being swamped by even more painful emotions. In maintaining the silence, bereaved siblings simultaneously attempted to protect significant others and to preserve some stability and integration in an otherwise radically changed world. While some experienced the silence as a painful exclusion and alienation or as an accusation feeding their guilt, and others needed the space because of a fear of further fragmentation, all the participants reported that they were unable to talk about their feelings or give expression to their grief. Where there had been previous losses in the family, the secrecy surrounding death and loss was even more impenetrable and the conspiracy of silence, the agreement not to disclose everything, and not to want to know everything, was intensified. For Cathy, living with the ghostly silence of other lost siblings made grieving and the open disclosure of her secret (i.e. that she had insisted that her brother take the car on the night of the accident) even more difficult and the loss experience more traumatic.

- *Silence and the circle of protection and self-protection:*

Cathy (76/60/31) : "There was very little discussion. As I say, [for] fifteen years we never mentioned his name and each one has developed in his own little cocoon. I think my father took his sorrow into his own little cocoon and my mother into hers. And there was never any open talk or how we felt"; "...it (i.e. mother's behaviour) was strange before my brother died...and I think it was all wrapped up with my sister's death and...I never even knew that I had a sister that had died. I can remember looking through a photo album and saying, 'Who's this?' and my mother saying, 'Oh, it's just a child, a cousin', or something. Never telling me that that is your sister...so she was also running..."; "...My dad also always said that, 'just keep quiet. You keep the peace', but when I was a child I didn't understand this".

Dia (11) : "I cannot verbalise such things immediately...I have to lie on my bed. I need to sort out my thing and then I will...Only when I feel that I can cope, then I'll talk about it but not before. Before that you must please leave me alone...".

Elena (22) : "In a funny way though, like my mother will never like sit down and like [say], 'Are you okay?' and...it's like she knows I'm there...the things I do. But I [also] won't necessarily like phone her up [and say], 'Are you okay?', you know. But, ja, she knows I'm there. The love's there...".

- *A façade contains and conceals the sibling's inner pain that remains hidden:*

Elena (64) : "Initially it was difficult because...I am not the type of person who likes to show my feelings to a lot of people and even though like my friends would come maybe the next day I wouldn't like burst out crying...I'm not that type of person...I think I actually put people in an awkward position because they'd come and I'd like smile at them and [say], 'How are you?' type of thing, you know, and they'd like, 'But hang on...' I mean I would smile at them although inside me you could see that I was hurting and like sad..."

Cathy (14) : "...As I say, I felt like an outsider...ja, sitting outside the whole [thing]...but being very torn as well. And very upset."

Dia (16/57) : "...okay...we did make the arrangements together (i.e. after the death) and that sort of thing but they never, *never* asked how one felt about it. *Mercifully* not. It would have been very bad..."; "I had a friend at that stage but not that I would trust him...it takes longish for me to trust a guy to talk to him about things that I have not yet sorted out...if I haven't sorted it out...emotional trust I find difficult. So with him, I didn't really..."

In addition to the need to protect and be strong for their parents, some participants also recognised as profound the loss suffered by other significant others in their deceased sibling's world (a husband, lover, child, close friends) and this silenced them even further. Caught up in all the sorrow there was no room for the participants to mourn openly or immediately and the conspiracy of silence was maintained by friends and others. For some participants, the question arose as to who-owned-the-pain and even negated the entitlement to mourn.

- *Awareness of the pain of other significant others silences the self further:*

Cathy (68) : "...and I think after it happened I went into that hazy world of...you're not allowed to be sorrowful because you're alive and it's their child that died not yours..."

Dia (37/66/81) : "...My mother realised...[that] to him (i.e. to her sister's husband) she is just as important [as to the family]...you know, for him it was *worse* than for anyone else..."; "It was interesting to me just...after the accident. I often went...to him (i.e. brother-in-law) between classes and helped him with exercises and so on, but I knew that for him [the visits] revolved around *speaking*, you know. It was awful for him...because he and I were actually friends, I had to almost support him as well..."; "...I don't want it to sound as if I considered it to be a tremendous responsibility, but it is just a thing that happens around you and you see people around you struggling, you know, and this does not make your task actually so much easier".

Elena (46) : "And I love to see his friends...especially people he was close to although it's very difficult to communicate with them because when they see me...they obviously [think] 'Tom!', you know...get a picture of him. So for *them* it's difficult as well as for me because I can sense that, even though I would love to sit down and ask them, you know, 'Tell me a story', or ... 'What did he say when you did this? you know. But...Ja...it's not like that unfortunately..."

8. A sense of separateness, loneliness and alienation is experienced.

The loss of a sibling is a profoundly lonely experience. Although participants felt that they were part-of the grief situation yet they were also apart-from it. Immersed in their parents' pain and the grief of others, their relationship to their sibling and their grief did not seem to have a place that could be identified on the map. Their parents were so torn and vulnerable that the participants could not risk letting in the suffering and give open expression to their own grief.

In addition, participants also experienced a distance in their relationships with others and their sense of separateness, of being-apart-from the world of others, was amplified by the behaviour and

comments of others and, for some participants, the lack of acknowledgement that they too had suffered a significant loss. While at times surrounded by people, participants felt very alone in their grief. They sensed the awkwardness of others in being with the bereaved and this isolated them even further.

While some participants felt utterly alone, lost and frightened by the profound awareness of their alienation and others accepted and even welcomed the solitude as a safe space to reconnect with the self and try to make sense of the loss and their chaotic emotions, they all experienced a need to feel connected to their world. Even in withdrawal they all essentially needed to know that they were linked to others.

- *It is an experience of being a- part-of and also apart-from the grief situation:*

Cathy (9/10/71) : "Ja and even at the funeral, I can remember...after the funeral...it was a strange thing...it was as though it was something that happened that was not part and parcel of me...it was something that I was observing...It was terrific pain that my mum and dad had and I was observing all of this"; "...and also no one really owned that I was part of the family...with the result that you think that you are a bit of an outsider...that it is those people that are pained and are so...in sorrow, not you, and I think it becomes...something that you well up inside...because you don't give yourself...you don't really think you have the right...to be emotional about it because it is their *son* that died and it's *only* your brother..."; "...I think there was an awareness of my sorrow but no acknowledgement...not my mother or even my father. I think perhaps they were...I'm just saying that perhaps they were so involved in their sorrow that...but I do know I was outside the whole [thing]...I was an onlooker"

Dia (74/77) : "It really helped that I had my own time...that I could withdraw and that was the greatest help...I think it was really my salvation that...that I was not forced to...to experience this *together* with the family, you know, or to work through it together...that I could do it by myself...But I still found time for myself and the storm outside...I didn't have to see it all..."; "...for me the *greatest* help was that I had time, that I was not sucked in [to the parents' grief]. That would have been really terrible."

- *A sense of distance from others intensifies the loneliness and alienation:*

Cathy (8/55) : "And there was much phoning and people coming and...I can't remember anyone...really coming up to me and saying, 'We're so sad', you know (wept). And I don't know if it was because I withdrew or because, you know, they...it was my mom and dad that lost their child, you know"; "...you fight in the dark, you know. You have this person that is your *mother* that is reacting so *abnormally* towards you and you don't know why. And here you are, you're battling with all this pain and there's no help".

Dia (17) : "And my friends were there (i.e. at the funeral)...they were [there for her]...but as much as you can support someone else when you also have to hand in your thesis...and you are busy arranging your wedding and so on, because they were all, you know, in line...It was not as if I experienced it that they were not there, never, but they had other priorities..."

- *The discomfort of others in being with the bereaved, isolates the sibling even further:*

Cathy (59/70) : "You know what else happened? Our friends couldn't cope with our sorrow so they stayed away... No one ever discussed... They'd say to you, 'Have your parents got over the death of your brother?' you know that sort of thing..."; "...No one ever sympathised or asked me how I felt or ...perhaps they did and then I closed up, I don't know... but I cannot remember anybody, barring that person that came up after the funeral. I remember *that* very clearly so I'm sure I would have remembered other things. I think, you know, I always got the feeling that people *outside* your sorrow couldn't cope with...so what they did, they avoid eventually and I always put it down to that - that they can't cope..."

Elena (23) : "...If I really need to [talk] I will just say something but not really much, you know ...even though I am very close with my friends...I don't want to put them in that position because they feel awkward...I might just say, you know, 'I wonder what my brother would think'..."

- *With the evolving loneliness, the need to feel linked to others remains:*

Cathy (57/58/59) : "If someone had helped *her* (i.e. mother) and helped *me*. Perhaps even after my sister's death, if someone had helped her *then*. But my mother's a very proud person and...I think *that* in many ways caused a lot of extra pain..."; "...with the loss and the guilt and everything else that came with the death of my brother...her very strange behaviour...and of course you don't realise that [it is part of her grief] because you yourself are destroyed...I mean, I was destroyed after that... emotionally"; " So here I was left as an only child and all my friends were running away... and there was no one that I could talk to...or even tell about my mother's behaviour..."

Dia (54/55) : "But now, there is tremendous support in the family and circle of friends for my parents and for me. I think it is also a very...important thing"; "...this friend of my mother's...she was the type of personality that...if there was a *crisis* then she was there...I think she was really a *mother* to me...an *idol* in a way...because she never *spoke* about things, but she *acted*...she was *there*...she was always...that's what she taught me about friendship...that *unconditional* friendship. So she would immediately drop everything and say...'I'm going...' ...and this happened *repeatedly* you know. So that support was there and it was very valuable."

Elena (46) : "Ja, and I love to see his friends, you know, especially people he was close [to] although it's very difficult to communicate with them..."

9. There is a lingering sadness as the future is faced without the sibling.

At some point the focus shifted from anxiety about their parents' bereavement to the meaning that the loss of their brother or sister had for them. There was a gradual awakening of the fuller meaning of the loss of the sibling. Although only one person had died, many different kinds of relationships were lost - their childhood playmate/adversary; the one who affirmed their sense of self but who also challenged their inauthentic social self/persona; someone who although not always present, would always be there for them; that could share in the important events in their lives; that even though they may not have got on well together, were still the only ones that could understand and share in the care of their parents in a crisis or in old age, when ill or dying; etc. With each transition in their own lives the participants felt anew the profound loneliness of their sibling's absence.

Although they grieved silently, the participants remained internally active and they all describe a lingering pain, sadness and missing of their deceased brother or sister. They feel the lack and think constantly of their brother or sister, not only what he or she would be like *now* or the meaning that their relationship would have had in the present, but also the lost opportunity for sharing and support

in their passage through life. They look to the future with sorrow because the sibling cannot physically be there with them.

On reflection the participants realise the significant role that their sibling had played in their lives - not only in terms of how they became who they were and the important lessons learnt in their passage through life, but also how their sibling had alleviated their sense of existential loneliness and affirmed them in many ways. In losing her brother, Elena realised how important his love was to her. In her relationship with her brother she felt accepted for who she was, experienced a sense of worth, of belonging and place and a sense of safety and protection in the world. For Dia the anxiety of absolute loneliness lay submerged for many years only to surface as a terrifying reality much later as she realised that, apart from one's child(ren), the only other enduring relationship is the relationship with one's brother or sister.

- *The sadness and the missing has a lingering quality:*

Cathy (65) : "...I have sadness. I am sad about what happened but I am not angry..."

Dia (40/41/42) : "And with my marriage, I must say that I began to miss her..."; "... At one stage I realised that my friends with sisters, I sort of...it's very nice [to have] support"; "... frequently I wondered what the situation would have been once I had children for example. I wondered how we would...how the relationship would have changed and ... when my parents began to get older, I often wondered how...how she would have seen it..."

Elena (9/56) : "You miss him a lot, you know. I always wonder what he'd be like...what he'd say to me in a certain situation...how our kids would be one day..."; " Ja, and the fact that he like can't be here for like my big days...you know, one day when I get married, I would have loved him to be there...that's really sad...just being *there*...being *him*...I was godmother not so long ago...I would have loved to see...what he'd say"

- *A deeper awareness of the meaning of their sibling in their lives evolves over time:*

Dia (44/53) : "Oh, yes. That is something else that I *now* realise that the anxiety that I had gradually built up of, Whew! You know, at some stage I will be alone...A husband is not really *family*. In the end he has a choice, you know. He has to be there or he doesn't have to, [but] your sister *must* be there, you know...and your child...Whether she feels like going or not, she will still..."; " She was definitely much stronger (than she appeared) and I know that...that I never underestimate little people and I think I base that on her...(laughs)...and quietish people ...you should also not underestimate...I think basically that was based on my knowledge of her strength..."

Elena(35/36) : " I think he...um...loved me a lot for what...Okay, obviously for who I was, but [also for] what I did for him..."; "...I think he...he respected me a lot and that...that means like the world to me, you know. He'd obviously told my friends...'she's the *best* in our family'...she doesn't obviously understand her value as much as she should', you know, and, 'she can just ask for anything and she'll get it'. That's how much...he thought I was like worth...it was nice, you know..."

10. The dialectic of holding on and letting go.

The sibling bond, not only as an extension of the primary parent-child relationship but also as an infinite and intense attachment in its own right, provided the participants with a sense of wholeness/oneness in their world. With the loss of their sibling, the participants felt fragmented and experienced a need to maintain the integration and stability that they had experienced prior to the death. They needed to hold on to their sibling in order to be able to face the future. One way of maintaining this wholeness was by integrating some of the characteristics that they perceived as belonging exclusively to their sibling within themselves. In the search for her brother, Elena was surprised and delighted to rediscover her sibling in herself - a facial expression, an inflection of voice, a phrase as he would have used it, which kept her brother alive in her.

Another way of keeping the sibling close was by taking up some of the roles that the deceased brother or sister had played in their lives or in their parents' lives. Where the participants experienced themselves as very *separate* from their sibling at the time of the loss, the attempt to fill the emptiness remained a yearning. In Dia's situation, qualities of her deceased sister revealed themselves in her own child and she realised that there was the risk that her daughter could become the embodied representative of her sister.

While realising that their sibling could live on only in memory, the yearning for continuing contact is strong and the possibility of being reunited with their sibling provides comfort and hope for some.

- *Recovering the lost relationship:*

Elena (25/55) : "...it's a strange thing ...it's almost as if when he left, he left me with that little magic...I can't explain. He had such an air [about] him, and such ... an *energy* to him that I loved and in a way...he's left me with it. I feel he's left me with it...which is beautiful and I think I'll carry it through with me...Ja, a *feel* of his..."; "...and like...sometimes the way I say something it's exactly like *he* said it...and I *love* it. I just...I *love* it although not everyone will realise it obviously because they don't know him or...but...ag!...I *love* it...it brings a smile to my face...reminds me of him. I won't say it like on purpose...say it because he said it, but obviously from being together and stuff, you pick up things he says, you know, and...it will come out...and 'Wow!'..."

Dia (45) : "...but my daughter, I think, grew into that role...of...you know, we are very close. We have the same sort of humour. We share lots...we are also very different. She is a performer, I would rather, please stand behind the curtain (laughs)...and sometimes she does things and I really thought hard when she...said that she wanted to study music [like Dia's sister] whether I tried...to [push] her in a direction..."

- *The longing for reunion persists:*

Elena (66) : "I don't know if you meet again as souls or if it happens like that, but if you do I'd love ...I'd love...to somehow be with him again if it is, because...I don't know if there are answers but...these are theories. Everyone's got a different theory, you know. I've never been there and come back, you know...but gee, I'd be the happiest chappie! Ja..."

11. Memories are significant, providing continuity and giving new meaning to the loss.

By the time they had reached young adulthood the participants had accumulated a wealth of memories based on many shared experiences with their brother or sister. Although their sibling was no longer present in the physical world, their presence was made possible by recalling and memories played a significant role in the mourning process. Participants latched on to specific memories, at times intentionally replaying these, at other times, being haunted by them. Memories filled the gap created by their sibling's death, brought the past back into the present and vicariously, in imagination, gave them back the future - a future that had been stolen from them by death. Any little memory, however inconsequential it appeared at the time, was recalled and internalised, helping to bridge the gap of absence, reinforcing the familiar sense of self and giving meaning to their sibling's life and death. As the past was returned to and relived, new meanings emerged that provided a sense of comfort and ongoing attachment; the reassurance that although the sibling was no longer present, the relationship had not been lost. Remembering their sibling clearly was essential to movement in the mourning process.

In the review of the past, the dual relationship with the lost sibling was of central importance. Were they close or not close enough? What was the brother/sister like and what did this tell them about themselves? Naturally the way the participants remembered and perceived their brother or sister and themselves (as seen through the eyes of their deceased sibling) depended on what they chose to remember and understand of their sibling's life and death. Shared experiences and memories were repeatedly reviewed and reinterpreted in the light of the present, giving new meaning to the life and death of their sibling. Through her sister's remembered voice, Dia's memory of her elder sister was that she was uncertain, timid, always seeking reassurance. These memories not only affirmed Dia as the strong, fearless, independent one, but also made her aware that perhaps her sister would not have coped well with the hardships of life. Elena recalls her brother's zest for life, how she had assisted him and also how much he loved her. This affirmed her in a positive way (as a good caretaker) and also provided some comfort in the thought that her brother had lived his short life to the full.

Images that remained frozen (either positively or negatively) impeded movement into the future. The absence of memories, as in Cathy's situation where she and her brother had not shared many interests or activities as they were growing up, created an even bigger void or gap. There was a break in the sense of continuity that inhibited relatedness to the world in the present and created difficulties in facing the future. Memories then remained fixed on the pain of the loss and it was more difficult to make sense of the death and to place it in a meaningful context.

For some participants, listening to the stories of others that had been close to their deceased sibling created new memories, making the deceased sibling present in a more immediate, vital and real way.

These lived stories, usually of non-shared sibling experiences, opened a window to the "otherness" of the deceased sibling and gave back "time" that had been lost. They enabled the survivor to hold on to the deceased brother or sister for longer, to remember him or her more fully. The stories filled the gaps in the narrative of the deceased sibling's life by providing a fuller picture of their brother or sister and what he or she meant, and continued to mean, to everyone, including the survivor. For Elena, there was also the realisation that, with the passage of time, memories of her brother would fade, and the fear that not only the person, but also the relationship, would be lost.

- *Memories brought the past into the present and gave new meaning to the loss:*

Dia (39/78) : "And you know for me ... the fact that my sister was who she was, that for me was very easy because...very often I could console myself that she would, in any case, have coped with difficulty with all the difficult things [of life]. And actually she had the best part of her life...and she was married, she had that experience. So, you know, from then on, I think only the more difficult things come...And I thought, Wow! you know. She was ... she was not cheated...Thereafter, I often...I realised that she was sort of spared"; "Thereafter I often wondered how much he (sister's husband) would have dominated her...he can be emotionally hard and that's what I often wondered about..."

Elena (7/28) : "...my brother was a success story for me...like the way he changed and the way he was, like towards the end...the way he felt about himself, the way he showed it to other people...as if he knew he was going...Ja (he lived life fully) but towards the end he changed almost to a better person and a lot of people saw that and that's...that's why I say his was a beautiful story because even though he'd maybe spoken aggressively before...towards the...end, I think it was the last 3 months...he was *soft*, I don't know, he wouldn't shout...he was content with himself...and that's how I see it as a success story"; "...He was a busy body...I think he wanted to live life to the full...he wanted to do anything and everything that he could ... and it almost makes sense, you know, after he'd gone. I don't know ... maybe that's *why* he was like life-hungry..."

- *Memories filled the gap in the present and the emptiness that threatened in the future:*

Elena (10/54) : "...and I think the saddest part is that I can associate *now* more because I can remember him now, you know, because I'm also young...In twenty years time I won't...be able to *see* him as older...you almost feel like you're losing touch and that's very sad..."; "...what I hate most about this is that the older like I get the more distant the memories will become...I won't remember his smile or the way he said something, you know, or...and I think that saddens me most because it's obviously distancing him from me, you know..."

- *Some memories were painful and were evaded or actively forgotten:*

Cathy (34/35) : "...He loved...motorbikes...he'd go on these bicycles...racing bicycles, in groups with the other chaps and um...there are still certain sounds that one remembers"; "...I don't think you...you don't lose [the memories]...sometimes it dims and then [at] other times the things that you can't remember, you remember very well again...I think it depends on the normal mental state or your emotional state, perhaps. You want to remember and what you don't, you don't..."

Elena (69) : "I don't want to look at him as...like a *pain*, you know...it's obviously very confused feelings because it is *that*...but I'd like to remember him...as happy, as he always was...The energy that he had...I just don't want to ever let go of that and just see it as, 'Tom : tragedy'; 'Tom : dead'; 'Tom : bike accident'...I want to see like, 'Tom : happy'...Like he used to hoot a thousand times before he came into the house...that energy that he had...and that's what I want to remember and like

associate with his name...and that beautiful person people saw in him, and the things he did for people and like the way he touched my heart... "

- *Sharing stories created new memories that provided "presence" and bridged the gap of absence:*

Elena (24/29/30) : "...especially in the beginning, I would just like hear happy stories about him and ... 'Ah, he would do this!'...and I'd love to hear things he did...initially I wanted to find out everything about him from all his friends that I didn't know because I obviously knew the 'brother-side' of him, you know...and I wanted to know the friend-side, the boyfriend -side, the every-side of him"; "...any little story, you know. It's like almost like I can latch onto it for some *more*, or like remember him even *more*..."; "So you know, having heard everybody's like little stories...his friends would come up to me...a friend I'd never met...and he says to me, 'You don't know what your brother has done for me'...he did things that really touched people...'You don't know what he's done. He's the greatest person, you know...He's helped me so, so much. I'm so grateful'...hearing things like that, I think that makes me...you know, proud of him ...that's like *real* stories...not just what he wore...where he went...it's like actual...".

With his/her death, their sibling's identity became “fixed” or “frozen” in certain ways not only within the family (usually remembered in glorified terms) but also in the minds of the participants. Death no longer allowed the sibling to exist in the real world of human interaction that could challenge the family's myth or the participants' preconceptions of him or her. The vital, fluctuating, sometimes enmeshed, sometimes conflicted sibling relationship no longer existed. With the incredible loss and the blow to their self perception, most participants were inclined to remember their deceased sibling in absolute terms - as the energetic “beautiful” person, the one that lived life to the full, or the timid, fearful one, the protected one, etc. These fixed or “frozen” images helped to restore a sense of stability in their world: preserved the sibling bond as it had existed and maintained the self in the old sense.

Where the relationship had been a very polarised one (fearless-fearful; daring-timid; strong-weak; etc.), and part of the self had been surrendered to the sibling, the loss of the "other" part of self created a huge vacuum and holding on to the fixed image of their deceased sibling restored a sense of integration. Where there was a close relationship with the deceased sibling, *idealisation* became part of preservation. Seeing the sibling in a positive light brought back the closeness and a sense of stability. Acknowledging the negative could annihilate this significant attachment:

It was only with time that some of the participants remembered their siblings more clearly and also realised that just as they had changed their sibling would also have grown. Letting go of these fixed or “frozen” images facilitated the transformation of the relationship and allowed a new sense of self to emerge. Imagination was critical to the process and facilitated the mourning process.

- *"Frozen images" preserved the relationship as it existed and provided continuity:*

Cathy (33/47) : "I still think...about him...as he was when he died...a young man, you know, and he was a very good-looking young man..."; "I remember him as a young man, not so much as a child. I remember him as a young man."

Dia: (80) : "...You know we were so different...I was prepared to tackle things that she was not... she was really...not very adventurous...not very daring. Not at all. She would *never* go overseas for three months after she had studied (as Dia did) without knowing exactly where she was going, you know, to places, you know, to people..."

Elena:(32/67) : "...and that's another nice thing, you know. He took a girl and, yes, she is a beautiful girl and all, but she had a child and I think [that] a lot of men won't take a woman, as beautiful as she might be, with a child. I know. I discussed that with some of my friends and they were like, 'I don't want the extra baggage', type of thing, you know. And he took her..."; " And I think I am really glad that I can still look on him in a positive light, you know, with a smile on my face...ja, I think that's very nice..."

- *Imagination facilitates a synthesis of a new relationship with the lost sibling and forwards the mourning process:*

Dia (52) : "...a person really wonders what she would be like now. Because you remember her with her young...everything, you know, and if I think of how [much] my personality has changed...maybe not totally...but...very, very...much more patient...I can imagine that she probably [would have] much more self confidence...[she would be] much more assertive even...Interestingly enough I remember that I could *never* see her as a school teacher who could cope with a whole class full of children...And I can't remember that she ever complained that it was unmanageable for her...Now that I think about it, she has grown in my mind...!" (laughs).

12. A heightened awareness of unpredictable mortal existence allows for other important aspects of life to emerge.

For the participants the loss of their sibling was a harsh confrontation with human finiteness. While they were aware that death was definite, the "When" and the "How" was indefinite. Prior to the loss, death was part of the natural order of life - old people died. Now the participants know differently. Death can come at any time. The realisation of unpredictable mortal existence shatters the assumption of enduring contact but also leads to personal growth through reflection and a re-examination of their own lives, personal beliefs and values. Dia questions herself and her faith, and her relationship to God becomes a more personal and meaningful one; one that is lived rather than merely spoken about. Cathy on the other hand, because of her perceived involvement in the circumstances of her brother's death, questions herself more than God and does not try to make sense of her brother's untimely death beyond her own strong sense of being-to-blame. Elena who is still in the early part of the process, recognises the importance of her faith and realises that although this has been shaken by the death, she needs to work on re-establishing her relationship with God.

Anxiety about the lack of control in their world and the awareness that they themselves could die, or that they could lose others close to them, coexists with a renewed appreciation of significant relationships and a need to nurture these. For some participants the death also precipitates changes in

their relationships to others and brings into sharper focus other important aspects of life including the significance of unconditional friendship and a compassion for the suffering of others.

- *Awareness of human finiteness brings into sharper focus spiritual aspects of life:*

Dia (73) : "...at that stage, twenty-one ... is also a time that you have not sorted yourself out properly in that respect (i.e. religious beliefs). You are emotional, perhaps very...you know this school religion can actually go terribly overboard...it's...almost a mass ...hysteria. And I don't want to shoot it down. Not at all. For many children it is of great value but one must see how long it lasts...It was very easy at a Christian Student Society camp to say, Yes... wonderful. The Lord is everything!' But when you find yourself in such a situation then it is a double-take...of *really* being in such a situation to...as I say with [my] friend's sister's and my sister's death, because their deaths were only six months apart, it was almost one thing...in that respect of, 'Why?' you know...and to deal with it. You are half involved in working through it when the second one occurs and you have to deal with that as well."

Elena (20/27) : "... religion-wise it's [i.e. the loss] changed me. I used to be a lot more religious...I won't say I'm angry with God. I won't say I'm upset with him but I've just *distanced* myself from Him...although lately it is better, you know, I am getting closer...but before I didn't...not that I wouldn't go to church...but I wouldn't *feel* it as I felt it before...I really don't know why..."; "...which is not nice but I think it's just something I have to like work through...I think the worst part is I can't really pinpoint it because it's not anger...I'm not angry with God for taking him away...I don't hate Him for it...I'm just, I guess... disappointed...Ja...I guess a bit disappointed...but I must work my way through that. I'm already much bet(ter)...well better...just a bit more time...it will come. Ja."

Cathy (38) : "...I've often thought about it. It never came up in my mind that: 'Why did God do this?'... perhaps I was blaming myself more than God ..."

- *Fear of death frequently coexists with a renewed appreciation of significant relationships:*

Dia (36) : " But I retained a *tre-men-dous* anxiety about travelling by car to the sea. This year (i.e. 30 years after the death) for the first time I realised...you know, it's all right. I...you know afterwards it got so bad that I thought: 'OK now we're at K., we've made it!'; 'Now we're at B., we've made it'; you know. That's how I travelled to the sea. It was...it was very bad. And I...these days I laugh at myself because I still think that you are going to...[have] a problem...an accident, when you're on the main road. I immediately put my seat belt on whereas here [back home] I would forget. So I...it clicked..."

E (47/48) : "...Ja, death's a very strange thing to deal with...I fear death...before it has never touched home. It's not really an issue, because...look, people die, but yes, I guess they're old and things like that..."; "...but from experiencing my brother's death I fear...I fear losing my parents...or anybody close to me, you know...I don't fear it every day...I won't say it really affects me...I just...I'd appreciate maybe people...like my parents, more... because I know they won't be here anymore...you know, like forever type of thing...always be here type of thing. But through the death I've basically realised it doesn't happen...They're not always going to be there, so I appreciate them more in ways, you know..."

- *The loss precipitates an awareness of the value of support and a compassion for others:*

Cathy (37/45) : "It's a...bereavement is a strange thing...it's...you can't picture the moment...and I often wonder, in small children, what happens there?...there isn't that [understanding]..."; "As I say, I think on looking back, bereavement counselling would have helped a lot, you know. But I've often thought, 'I wonder how parents would take to a child going for counselling'. You know, it's also still very much a new area, this counselling thing. They *counsel* children that have emotional problems but they don't regard a loss as a counselling problem...I see this at school as well...to me [counselling]

has become such an important ... after having gone to Lifeline and realising what it *did* do and I think if people become more aware of counselling and...for children as well. Children need help because it (i.e. loss) is very traumatic, you know..."

Dia (55) : "And she (i.e. family friend) was the type of personality that...if there was a *crisis* then she was there..... So she would immediately drop everything and say...'I'm going...' And this happened *repeatedly*, you know. So that support was there and it was very valuable".

13. Submitting to the changes liberates the self and allows for a second transformation.

All the participants experienced their lives as being permanently changed by the loss. Resolution meant submitting to these changes, grieving for that which had been lost and being open to the emergence of a new sense of self. Although all the participants had reached some resolution by the time of the interviews, one is still in the relatively early stages of the process. But even for those participants whose loss occurred many years ago the journey continues.

Participants had defined themselves not only in relation to parents and their perceptions of them ("I know my children well!") but also in relation to their siblings (good-bad; vulnerable-strong; responsible-irresponsible; etc.). At some point there is the realisation that these polarised roles were simply that - just roles that they were playing and that, in fact, part of the self had been externalised onto the sibling. By integrating characteristics of their sibling, participants found themselves re-owning parts of the self that had been surrendered to the sibling. Thus Dia, the younger of two children who with the death of her sister became the eldest (and only) child, found herself acknowledging that she could be adventurous as well as responsible. Elena, the youngest of three children, who had perceived herself as weaker than her older brothers, surprises herself by her strength.

Although painful, accepting that they were separate from their siblings and from their parents was to meet with the challenge of loneliness and to move on; to begin living their own lives again and to walk their own path, rather than trying to live someone else's life (that of their deceased sibling). However, while all participants had returned to active participation in their own lives and had reconnected with their own goals by the time of the interviews, this was not without some conflict and ambivalence. For Cathy the return to active participation in her life was more of an escape from an intolerable home situation and she continues to struggle with the loss, while for Dia the task of separating from parents, though painful and extremely traumatic, was a culturally and developmentally ground-breaking achievement and gave rise to a renewed and positive sense of self. Elena is still tentatively moving towards accepting her separateness but is aware that to move on is to grow and accepts that she can follow her own path without feeling that she is somehow betraying her loved ones in doing so.

- *A new sense of self emerges following the loss of the sibling:*

Dia (49/81) : "She (i.e. sister) was the eldest with a sense of responsibility which, of course left me more *free*..."; [After the loss] "I don't want it to sound as if I was burdened with responsibility but you see everyone around you suffering and that does not make it easy..."

Elena (63) : " Ja, it's just that you don't think that you're that strong, you know. I've obviously become a lot stronger...Ja, it's...'Okay, so take it when it happens', you know..."

- *In the process of reclaiming the self, conflicting feelings and thoughts are present:*

Dia (29/32/33) : " ...this was a thing that was very difficult...to...not really to get permission but *emotionally* to give *myself* permission to move away from home. *That* was very bad...I remember it was *terrible* to have to go and tell them that I wanted to move...For me it was... worse than going into an examination...it was grim...really grim..."; "...They (i.e. parents) definitely did not understand why I wanted to leave home and it was *terribly, terribly* traumatic for me to say this ... to get myself so far as to say, 'Now I am going!'; "...They are the most dear, most supportive people you can get. But...I think they could not get over it...I think that their needs were obviously considerably greater than their insight into *my* situation...That made it...I must say...I had to try and shake it off forcibly..."

Elena (71/72) : " Ja (getting back into her own career). I think I was doing something just for *me*...I'm not really a selfish person, you know. I'll do a lot for others if I know them...I guess I did this for *me*...I was just accepting something for *me* and not living...it was something that...if I didn't do...I think I'd regret one day...if I never did that for me, I would turn around one day and say [that] I should have and I didn't want to do that, for me. So I might as well give it a try"; "...it's Marketing research...Ja [it's] interesting...It's nice. Totally different to...the business (i.e. deceased brother's business)...I enjoy the environment...And you feel like you're always furthering yourself ...in my career, because obviously I'm learning and it's a whole new learning experience..."

Cathy (40/75) : "...and I often wonder...perhaps it is because I am inclined to run...from emotional...in anything...on TV...I switch [off]...and as a child I used to cry in movies that other people never cried. And I think when you're like that you try and escape and I think that feeling was always with me. [But] I can remember after 3 years I went to teach at X and I never...thought [that] perhaps I would escape it. I never had that feeling, you know, I just knew I was going. I took everything that was at home with me. The thought of getting away from it never entered my mind. I just knew that for *my* health and for my *emotional* survival I had to get away from home...at this stage I was 25/26...I went to X...yes it all went with me. It was like I packed it in the suitcase...the emotions, the..."; "...only these last few years that I felt...I am free of...to a certain extent confined...whole thing put on me. As though I'm starting to be my own person, not trying to be someone else's person..."

While a degree of forward mobility is achieved, it is only much later that some of the participants are able to break through the silence and self-alienation, give themselves over to their sorrow and openly grieve for their sibling. Being able to share their tormenting emotions and the trauma of their loss experience, even share their secret guilt, unfreezes the mourning and they feel that they can cope a bit better. Acknowledging their vulnerability and emotions, the truth of what lay inside themselves (the "guilt", the intense pain and hurt), letting go of the façade and submitting to the changes that the loss had brought about in their world, was liberating and allowed the grief process to run its course. This sharing was only possible in a relationship with an "other" who was trusted, whether husband/wife or counsellor/therapist, someone who could be present to the participant in a certain way; would not become upset or judge the grieving survivor.

Realising that they could not control life, learning to live without the answers to the mysteries of life and death, and forgiving self and others for being less than perfect opens up the future again.

However, while the participants are aware of the transformative impetus that the experience has given to their self development and their attitude towards life, they remain deeply aware of the cost of this transformation.

- *Letting go of the anger, hurt and guilt facilitates movement in the grief process:*

Cathy (29/30) : "...I think to a certain extent there is still a lot of guilt wrapped up in him having been in the car..."; "but I think you've got to let go as well, you know, can't live...As I had to eventually let go of...you know...I knew my brother was my mother's favourite child, you know. She was very protective of him. He was very much like her family...".

Dia (70) : "And that was another thing...religion...Fortunately at one point I got so far as to realise that I was allowed to be angry... For a long time I felt, yes, I'm annoyed and it's a very stupid thing to let happen. It was unnecessary. Look at how many lives have been messed up and people who...but for me it was a very, very big relief to realise that I may be angry as long as I could say this *directly* that, 'I am angry, help me sort it out'. I think it was okay for me...now I can cope..."

- *Actively mourning the loss was only possible in the presence of a trusted other:*

Cathy (66) : "...I couldn't tell anyone until I went to Lifeline...It brought it out and for the first time I could say that I felt so guilty and that."

Dia (35/82) : "...But after my marriage (3 years after the loss), for the first six months, I was able to really cry about it for the first time and I could say to my husband, 'It was *terrible* for me'...He's not one for speaking much but I could really verbalise...one, two or three episodes where for five minutes I would say that and that was terrible...that was enough for me... Afterwards it was alright..."; "I had the emotional trust...and he is the type of guy who wouldn't be upset with it, you know...I knew that I could say as much as I wanted to. He would not insist that I say more."

- *"Letting-be" allowed for a second transformation, one based on forgiveness of self and others:*

Cathy (31/32) : "She (i.e. mother) used me in many ways, I think...She was a very hard woman... I didn't realise at that stage that she had had so many...[losses] and she was very, very hard on me..."; "But I don't think you can...you must worry [about] 'why?'. No ... lately I just thought, well that was the way it was and you just got to accept and just get on with it..."

Dia (72) : "...So I accept that there is Someone who can plan and I am...I'm absolutely amazed by...planning. I am fanatical about planning (laughs). So if Someone can make provision for things so that this whole thing resulted in a whole subtle chain of how things are connected ...if someone can conceptualise this, then I must trust Him with the planning of my life. This is something that clicked with me. So the accusation (towards God) that I had in that respect has become for me: 'Good. I know better. I don't have to explain to you why I did this but I know better', and I must accept it like that."

Elena.(58/59) : "...and especially seeing your parents like that...you don't want to accept it like that...it *hurts* to see them like that...a lot"; "[But] I don't blame them for it, you know. I don't blame anyone for anything...its like, no one *did* it. It's just, that's the way it's become, you know..."

6.5 Structural Synthesis

The aim of this section is to present a synthesis and structural summation of the phenomenological psychological description of the experience of the loss of a sibling in young adulthood.

The lived experience of losing a brother or sister through death is a transformative experience and the sorrow that accompanies the loss is multi-layered and multidimensional. It is an intensely painful and traumatic experience and the impact of the loss is long-lasting. Only as the process evolves over time can all the shades and nuances be appreciated. It is fundamentally a loss of an intimate and significant other (a loved one) and, as such, the bereaved sibling experiences all the emotions associated with normal grief.

Losing a brother or sister is simultaneously experienced as a family loss. The total fabric of the family is ruptured. The death creates a fragmentation of the familial holding environment. The parents are "lost" in the way the family members had known them. The parents with their family intact are different parents to the ones now in profound grief. In this respect, the surviving sibling experiences a double loss.

The world of the bereaved sibling changes considerably. Occurring within the context of the family, the loss is experienced as a gap or emptiness, not only in the inner world, but also in the outer world - in the family structure where roles and tasks, responsibilities and expectations shift. Because the bereaved sibling experiences herself in a fundamental way in terms of her relationship to parents and siblings, the experience of the loss is also one that shakes her perception of self and of her being. Her whole relationship to the world and her world-view changes. The fragmentation of a shared world challenges the bereaved sibling's total emotional equilibrium and her sense of wholeness, rootedness, and belongingness.

Losing someone from her own family line and from her own generation throws everything that has been taken for granted into question and confronts the bereaved sibling with unpredictable mortal existence and with the terror of existential loneliness in later life. As such, it is also an experience that demands radical mourning, reorganisation and reintegration and continues to be felt long after the actual death. As the bereaved sibling moves through different transitional phases in her life, she feels the pain of the loss anew and becomes aware of future loss. Because of the infinite nature of the sibling bond and the assumption of enduring contact, she grieves not only for what has been lost in the present but also for what the future might have held - mutual support, sharing, and greater closeness. Thus, it is also an experience of "growing up" with the loss, and the grief is long-lasting.

Living together, growing up together, fighting with each other but just as often defending, comforting and helping each other; sharing parents and a common history, the experience of the loss of a sibling triggers myriad memories, both positive and negative. The flood is intensely bewildering. Ambiguous, paradoxical and conflicted emotions emerge that are often ambivalent. The internally disruptive experience cannot be faced immediately or all at once. Often it goes unshared. Initially attempts to withdraw, to resist the changes and the reality of the death and loss and to hide the painful emotions predominate. In some instances, the psychic camouflage and sub-total evasion persist for a long time. Externally the surviving sibling presents a façade and continues with life as "normal". To the outside observer, and even to the immediate family, she seems to be "coping well"; she is "strong", her grief seems to be "resolved", yet internally, she remains torn and the lingering sadness and missing persist.

The relational aspect of sibling loss is glaringly obvious. The "script" that was lived out with her brother or sister, no matter how flawed, has been ripped up. Adding to her heaviness and pain is her parents' intense grief, their seeming inability to comfort each other and their visible deterioration. Thus, the surviving sibling puts in "brackets" her loss, her pain - her very self - in order to care for, and protect her devastated parents. She experiences her parents' profound sorrow as a poignant imperative, an ethical and moral "demand"; a response-ability. Notwithstanding her grief for her sibling, she must be there for them. She cannot turn away from this appeal. Even though the assumption of enduring contact has been ruptured, the fabric that binds the family, the faith and trust that those that have been there since birth will be there for each other, persists and endures. Witnessing her parents' profound and unremitting grief, a fear gradually surfaces; the fear of losing her primary attachments as well. In some cases, this signifies the last vestige of her lost brother or sister, her link to the past, present and future.

With the threat of further fragmentation and in attempting to sustain significant attachments, the natural separation-individuation process is temporarily suspended. Lingering in the primary relationships provides a degree of continuity, stability and control over her world but is also restrictive and prevents mobility in her mourning. Over a period of time the bereaved sibling realises that there is nothing that she can do which will ever fill the space created by the death of the beloved child. Within the family context, she becomes attuned to the dialectic of increased attention and (benign) neglect as parents struggle to cope with their deep hurt and to confront their submerged fear of losing a child; a fear which has now become a reality. Now the bereaved sibling feels alienated and abandoned in a different way. She realises that her feelings go unacknowledged and unnoticed. The family life cycle becomes frozen and she feels as if there is almost no movement in her own mourning. The ever-present sense of existential guilt, of potential that has not been realised, erodes her emotional and physical health and she struggles to maintain an independent sense of her own worth from an "abandoned" position. Her grief is postponed.

The struggle alone to make sense of her loss puts a distance between her and the world of others and paradoxically removes her from her lived world. Instead of the profound fullness, her emotional world begins to feel empty. It is the experience of being an "involved-outsider", of being part of the grief situation yet also apart from it. Because everyone around her is so torn and vulnerable, the experience is a profoundly lonely, confusing and externally silent experience. Initially there is the shock, the inability to deal with her overwhelming emotions, a fear of breaking down and a sense of distance from others that silences her. Later, there is the desire to protect, and to be strong for her parents and to shield them from further pain. In addition, others fail to acknowledge that she too has suffered a significant loss and this maintains the silence. Constantly aware of the pain of others (parents, husband, lover, child, friends of the deceased), she hears and responds to the call to assuage their grief and suffering. The situation, as she experiences it, demands that she not abandon them; and she cannot afford to disintegrate. So she puts in abeyance her tattered self. She stays shrouded in silence. She remains, however, profoundly lonely and confused.

The bereaved sibling does not reveal her grief to her network of relations. It is as if her grief does not exist. Her own protective silence is aided and abetted by her parents' visible pain and by the uneasiness of others in being-with-the-bereaved. She begins to deny the full meaning of the pain of her loss. She questions whether she is even entitled to mourn - she, who is *only* the sister.

It is a blessing when finally someone, some event or some idea breaks through the silence, isolation and alienation and stirs the pool of emotions surrounding her loss. It is a grace when her grief begins to move outward. Whenever it does, learning about self gradually evolves. Deep learning about others and about the significance of spiritual aspects in her life develops. As she begins to digest her loss, her perception of the world expands to include death and loss of a young person as a harsh reality. She also comes to appreciate significant others in her life and feels a new compassion for those that are suffering. The power and flawed fragility of her family is brought home to her. It brings an appreciation of others outside the realm of family sorrow. By breaking through her silence, isolation, alienation and loneliness, she confronts her fear of death. Yielding to the pain and submitting to the changes are existentially painful. However, the confrontation dulls death's sting and forwards her mourning process.

Now she can "let be". Can accept that she has a life of her own and can live it without feeling guilt or shame that she is somehow betraying the deceased sibling or her parents. Only then can she let go of the cesspool of hurt, anger, fear and guilt. Letting go is liberating. It allows for another form of transformation, one that touches on liberation on various levels and dimensions of relations, reintegration. It opens new doors, windows upon the world. It carves out new roads into the future.

However, the sadness lingers. The future will come without the physical presence of the deceased sibling. There is no consolation but some comfort is derived from the perpetual presence of the deceased sibling as constantly present in absence; spiritually present as the survivor moves through the various transitional phases that will dot her life. There is an awareness of the rich legacy left by the deceased brother or sister and memories are held onto and fill the gap left by the deceased sibling.

6.6 Essential Structure

The lived experience of the loss of a sibling to death is a transformative experience and the sorrow that accompanies the loss is multifaceted and evolves over time. It is fundamentally a loss of an intimate and significant other (a loved one) and the surviving sibling experiences all the emotions associated with normal grief. As the loss threatens with fragmentation and isolation, fear and insecurity intensifies and the desire for wholeness, rootedness and continuity becomes paramount. Initially attention is focused on maintaining primary attachments that are also felt to be "lost", while "bracketing" the self and own grief. In retaining attachments to the familiar, a façade contains and conceals the grief as the need to remain functional dominates and the reality of the pain is evaded. From the trapped position of an "involved-outsider", the sibling's journey becomes a silent and lonely one and memories are held on to that fill the gap in the present and the emptiness that threatens in the future. Yielding to the grief and submitting to the changes is existentially painful but confrontation with the truth that lies within forwards the mourning process. Only then can the bereaved sibling let go of the hurt, anger, fear and guilt that allows for a different form of transformation; one based on forgiveness that liberates the self on various levels and opens up the future once again.