

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INVESTIGATION AND RESULTS

5.1 The Research Question

The research question of the present study is: “What is the experience of letting go?” To provide the study with the required data which reveals the experience as it appears in the life world, the following statement was posed:

More than likely, you have had to let go of someone, or something, significant (in your life). Please describe as accurately and concretely as possible a specific situation of your experience of letting go and what it was like for you – your thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Perhaps it is something that you are still faced with. Whatever it is, I would like to hear about it. I would like a clear and accurate description of a specific situation regarding your experience of letting go.

5.2 The Research Participants

- (A) Participant M: Marlene Married
 Female
 Age: 35 years
 Letting go: of her stillborn child.
- (B) Participant B: Ben Married
 Male
 Age: 43 years
 Letting go: through emigration.

- (C) Participant P: Penny Married
Female
Age: 55 years
Letting go: of her home, after thirty years.
- (D) Participant J: John: Married
Male
Age: 29 years
Letting go: of a premarital relationship.
- (E) Participant K: Karen Married
Female
Age: 48 years
Letting go: of her teenage son (and daughter).

5.3 Data Analysis

To be included as follows:

Participant A: Marlene (M)

Table I	Central Themes
Table II	Situated Constituents
Table III	Situated Narrative Description
Table IV	General Situated Structure

Participant B: Ben (B)

Table III	Situated Narrative Description
Table IV	General Situated Structure

Participant C: Penny (P)

Table III	Situated Narrative Description
Table IV	General Situated Structure

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Participant D: John (J)

Table III Situated Narrative Description

Table IV General Situated Structure

Participant E: Karen (K)

Table III Situated Narrative Description

Table IV General Situated Structure

Tables I & II for Ben, Penny, John and Karen appear in the appendix.

TABLE I

Participant A: Marlene (M)

Meaning Units	Central Themes
<p>(1) Two years ago M was pregnant and felt fortunate to be expecting a baby. She and her husband were really looking forward to having this child.</p>	<p>(1) M had not taken the event of her pregnancy for granted and, with her significant other, looked forward to having their baby.</p>
<p>(2) M thinks that it was difficult to let go because for seven and a half months, the baby was just a thought, but it was there and she could feel it kicking. The baby was a little human being that she had only seen on sonar so there was as yet nothing of a personal relationship. She was aware of the physical attachment and had looked forward to the idea.</p>	<p>(2) Although there was an awareness of a physical attachment to a human being, M experienced difficulty in letting go of the concept of a child with whom she had no personal relationship.</p>
<p>(3) M refers to the loss of her baby.</p>	<p>(3) M is aware of the loss of her baby.</p>
<p>(4) M will never forget the first morning when she woke up in hospital. It was as if she was faced with this decision. Her husband was sitting next to her, sleeping. It came before her: she had a choice. It was either to go on sitting there in a corner or just die, or how was she going to face</p>	<p>(4) M recalls the first morning when she was confronted with having to make a decision either to withdraw or to face the loss and move on. The awareness that she was not alone but with the significant other influenced her decision.</p>

<p>it? She knew that she had to make a decision, especially when she looked around and saw her husband asleep and she knew that he was also going through it – through the pain and everything.</p> <p>(5) The first thing is that physically M was empty, so she knew that she had lost something. M knew that she had lost something that, besides being an idea, was also a person. So actually the thoughts of having a child, seeing the child grow up, all of a sudden were gone. It was not just the physical emptiness. Christmas was not going to be the Christmas she thought she would have had for the first time.</p> <p>(6) M knew there was a lot of nonsense lying ahead emotionally. Physically she was going to recover. M knew that that was not a problem, but emotionally she knew that she was faced with a long path lying ahead.</p> <p>(7) The thing is M knew that she had to make a decision. First, she thought she was in control. She thought that she must make a decision and sort it out. It was either 'a' dying or 'b' facing it as there were positive things ahead and she decided on 'b' as she is still able to have more children. She viewed that as a</p>	<p>(5) M's experience of a physical emptiness made her aware of a physical and emotional loss. She realised that her loss was not merely the loss of a concept and its associated future, but also interpersonal.</p> <p>(6) M believed that she would recover physically, but was aware of an emotionally challenging path ahead.</p> <p>(7) M believed that she was in control and knew that she had to make a decision to either withdraw (die) or face (live) what lay ahead. As she could have more children M decided to be positive, and face it.</p>
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<p>positive choice, looking forward to having another baby.</p> <p>(8) She thought that if she did go and sit in that corner, she would just die and just drag everybody who was supporting her, especially my husband, my parents, his parents”. Their parents would have been grandparents for the first time, so it was not just her who was affected, but a lot of people around her as well. They also pretended to be strong in order to carry her.</p> <p>(9) She knew that if she sat for too long, she would nurture the pain and If she sat too long she would be stuck there. The pain and the feeling dead would actually engulf her and everybody around her. M believed that it would pull down her husband Larry as well.</p> <p>(10) What helped M was that she knew that she could not approach it in a selfish way. She could not go and sit and think it was just her. There were a lot of other people who went through this as well, others who lose their children on a daily basis. She heard of people that suffer a loss like that. It was not as if she was the only person.</p>	<p>(8) M rejected withdrawing as she believed that it would be to her detriment (to die) and to all who supported her, particularly the significant others. M realised that she was not alone in her loss.</p> <p>(9) M believed that a lengthy passivity would painfully overwhelm her and prevent her from moving on. The effect would be detrimental to the significant other and those close to her.</p> <p>(10) M’s consideration and awareness of others helped her decision. She realised that others also experience loss and that she was not alone in the pain of loss. She believed that she could not be self-centred and consider the experience as hers alone.</p>
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<p>(11) Really, she asked herself, it was a matter of: “What am I going to get out of this experience, if anything, if I am not getting what I thought I am going to get?” The baby was not in her arms. The physical pleasure of holding and seeing her baby was not there. She thought that if she could not get that, then she must get something positive. She was looking for an alternative to replace the baby.</p> <p>(12) M even felt life after that (information about the baby’s death in utero) but when she told the nurses they told her that it usual to think that before the caesarean. She thought that she did feel life after they confirmed that there was no life. M thinks that this was a result of her hoping and still believing.</p> <p>(13) Then, suddenly, M woke up and she was not pregnant anymore. It was seven and a half months and she still had six weeks to go. She had the Caesar. It did feel as if she had had the baby, but there was nothing. They gave her a little card with the footprints on it because there had been a birth. Now she had to go home two days later.</p> <p>(14) Fortunately M and her husband did</p>	<p>(11) In the awareness of the loss (of her baby), M questioned herself and sought something positive to fill the void/emptiness she experienced.</p> <p>(12) M did not immediately accept the loss (of her baby) and in her hopes and beliefs held on to her ‘baby’ as being alive and living inside her body.</p> <p>(13) Despite the pregnancy and ‘birth’, there was no baby, “there was nothing”. M was suddenly confronted with the reality of the absence and she had to go back home with an inadequate replacement (the card with the footprints on it).</p> <p>(14) M feels fortunate that there was no loss</p>
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<p>not start a baby room. They did not know whether it was going to be a boy or girl. They did not want to know.</p> <p>(15) She already pictured her child playing with her sister's children – the dreams, the names she was going to give, whether it was a boy or a girl.</p> <p>(16) M suddenly wondered over and over. "What now?" There was a hopeless feeling of where were the answers</p> <p>(17) For the first month or two, M admits that she thought that she was fine and forced herself after three weeks to go back to work. M thought that it would be good. In a way it was because she would communicate with people. People do come in and convey their condolences. Some do not. She felt, with no ill feeling, that people would avoid the issue. She can understand it from their point of view. M thought that by going back to work she would be fine, and that she would just carry on.</p> <p>(18) Later, M realised that she and her husband Larry avoided talking about their baby at home. She realised that she was starting to bottle it all up and then when they did talk, it would be just fine. M felt</p>	<p>of anything tangible and familiar that she and her significant other had got to know</p> <p>(15) M recognises the loss of future dreams, relationships and possibilities.</p> <p>(16) Suddenly, in awareness of the loss, M questioned what lay ahead. She felt hopeless and needed answers.</p> <p>(17) M initially (1-2 months) believed that she was fine and, in her effort to continue and maintain the familiar order she knew, M compelled herself to return to work, where she would relate to others.</p> <p>(18) M was aware that she and her significant other avoided talking about their baby. She vacillated from one extreme to the other, either controlling or overtly expressing her feelings, yet realised that this</p>
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<p>that it was in a wrong way. Either she just let go completely or she tried to bottle it up. There were the two extremes.</p> <p>(19) It was about two months; M admits that she tried to keep her social schedule extremely busy. M did drink a lot of wine on some occasions and then she would talk a lot. Then it was easy to talk. M also realised then that it was not the right way to solve it. It wasn't as if she was going on a booze cruise. She thinks that it was a way of letting all the inhibitions go so that she could talk.</p> <p>(20) It was after about two and a half to three months that M thought she must look at it from a different angle, because she could feel that the one day she was upset, the other day aggressive towards Larry. She would pick a fight or be miserable at work or just not feel like going to work. So M realised that she had to look at this from a different angle, because what was going to happen in a few years if she did not sort it out. M did not want to have issues about this possibility with future children. She did not want it to drag into her life.</p> <p>(21) It suddenly came to M. It was actually amazing to her that her child</p>	<p>was not satisfactory.</p> <p>(19) Through her behaviour M attempted to either control (keep busy) or express (via drinking) her feelings. She became aware of the need to freely express herself yet realised that she had not found the solution.</p> <p>(20) In the relationship with her significant other, M experienced fluctuating emotional changes and, with time (after about three months), realised that if she were to enter the future without a residue of the experience, she had to view things differently.</p> <p>(21) Suddenly, in amazement M developed an insight that the death of her baby was a</p>
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<p>never had a chance to live and the message was an awakening to life. As a person who had been alive for thirty-three years, the death of her unborn child was a message for (her) life. Her child did not have the opportunity to live but gave her the message for (her) life.</p> <p>(22) It wasn't a dream. The experience was real for M and came to her while she was awake. She had an amazing insight. M could view this experience so that she saw it clearly.</p> <p>(23) This actually opened up a window for M to her life. Previously, she would plan Christmas five months ahead. It was as if she received a gift out of the event. Working out the meaning of (her) life, which is to take out of every day the special things. She looked for these.</p> <p>(24) M believes that she was perhaps looking for the gift, and she is glad that she has found it ". With her everyday rush and running around, M was missing today, because there were so many special occasions when she was pregnant, when the baby would kick and she would sing in the shower, that she would sing a song, and Larry would tickle her stomach. It was so special. There were such special</p>	<p>gift. The realisation that he had not lived was a message for her to awaken to life and its meaningful moments, rather than live for the future.</p> <p>(22) M had an insight, which amazes her, of a clear and conscious experience in her lived reality.</p> <p>(23) The experience provided M with the gift of a new horizon regarding the meaning of (her) life, which is to seek and take the special moments out of every day rather than to live for the future.</p> <p>(24) M is grateful for having found her gift and realises that due to her haste (rush and running) and focus on the future, she had missed numerous special (present) moments of her pregnancy.</p>
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<p>moments on a daily basis.</p> <p>(25) When things did not materialise in the future as expected, and M would cry and make the whole event negative. She approached things from that angle, looking at how she felt when she was pregnant. M felt like the first mother on this planet. She felt beautiful and her child was beautiful. Everything was so perfect.</p> <p>(26) M's wondered what could she actually get out of this? The awakening and the message she received was that every day was so fragile. The future was so fragile. She felt that it was not her place in life to take things for granted or to contain it. Suddenly the message was a gift because she was one of those people who would stress about something that would happen in two months time, or she would stress about tomorrow and she would forget about today. M and Larry talk about it. Their whole life changed when they realised that this is their message from what happened: "Live for today".</p> <p>(27) M started the process slowly and not with sudden outbursts. She started slowly looking at the issue from different angles. Dealing with the loss was slow and so was trying a radically different approach but</p>	<p>(25) M realised that living for a future that could not fulfil itself lead to sadness and negativity, so she decided to approach her loss from a different angle and recall the joy, beauty and perfection of her pregnancy.</p> <p>(26) M sought gain from the experience and received the message as a gift to live for the present. This changes her life and vision as she realises that the fragility of life can neither be captured nor assumed to always be there (taken for granted).</p> <p>(27) With hesitance, M began to look at things from an altered perspective and gradually dealt with her loss as she slowly tested an entirely different approach.</p>
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<p>first testing it slowly. M told herself that she had lost her child and all the dreams of what they were going to do together.</p> <p>(28) M's way of letting go was letting go of the pain and the anger. She admits to having had a lot of anger and adds that she had to let go of the pain and the anger, in order to, accept what had happened. M acknowledges that she was using the pain and the anger as her child. She nurtured the pain before she actually started to move into the "acceptance phase" and start thinking pleasant thoughts</p> <p>(29) M was letting go of the idea of being this child's mother. It had seemed such a sure case that the first week in October she was going to be a mother. M would look into other people's prams and she would start talking to them, asking when they became pregnant and when their baby was due and telling them when her baby was due.</p> <p>(30) Her first "instinct" when M saw mothers and their babies was to avoid the prams, which was not a natural thing for her to do. That is when she started to realise that something was not right and that she was not facing it. M felt that she had to face the idea that she was not going</p>	<p>(28) M no longer held onto the pain and intense anger which she nurtured as her child, before moving onto acceptance and thinking pleasant thoughts.</p> <p>(29) M let go of what had seemed to be a predictable future reality. She let go of the thought of being a mother (to her lost child) and ceased to identify with other mothers.</p> <p>(30) M avoided reminders of the baby which was not natural for her. She began to realise that she had to confront the thought that she was not going to be her baby, Luke's, mother as anticipated.</p>
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<p>to be Luke's mother. She was not going to be this baby's mother now.</p> <p>(31) M did not have the signals at first that something was wrong because everybody thought that she was fine. M thought that she was fine because she was carrying on. M was fooling herself and she admits that she actually started to believe that. There was no warning about the pain, the pain that came later.</p> <p>(32) M repeats that her social schedule was busy and they just carried on. They were carrying this pain. It was there every day and night and she was so aware of it. She tried harder to lie to herself. <i>The heavier the pain, the greater the pretence.</i> M did not let go of the pain.</p> <p>(33) M did not let go of the pain immediately. It was as if nurturing the thoughts of her child was actually the pain itself. It was not happy, joyful or fulfilling during the time when she would sit and think of her child and look at her (first) little sonar photo's. The thoughts were filled with pain and she was angry. M did not want to forget and she thought of her child quite often, but it was just sad.</p> <p>(34) M also thinks that it is such a big</p>	<p>(31) There were no warning signs regarding the pain, as M carried on and continued to deceive herself and others, believing that all was well.</p> <p>(32) M continued with her busy schedule as she carried and held on to the pain that was consciously and constantly with her. She persevered with the deception and the façade ("The heavier the pain, the greater the pretence").</p> <p>(33) M held onto the pain. Sustaining the painful thoughts maintained a link to her child, whom she wanted to retain in memory. The frequent thoughts of her baby were not happy or joyful, but filled with pain, sadness and anger.</p> <p>(34) In anticipation of the significant event</p>
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<p>thing to actually have a child that she saw that she was running around in circle, around the event that never took place. <i>M</i> could not move on. It was part of the fooling game. Whatever she did would come back to the event. <i>M</i> could not move on. It was like a tornado sucking her back. It was big and overshadowed everything.</p> <p>(35) At some stage <i>M</i> realised that she was going on like a robot. <i>M</i> looked as if she was fine. She would smile, work, but it was false. She did what was expected of her. It was raw inside. Deep inside she was shattered and there was something wrong. She did not want to let go of the event that was supposed to take place.</p> <p>(36) <i>M</i> was so looking forward to this child that when she did lose her baby it was as if she did not want to put things away. This included everything that had happened and all the little things that had been bought. <i>M</i> was still living off everything that had happened – the pain, the sad news, thinking about the time when they saw the sonar. That is, the last sonar where they switched it off and the doctor said that there was no heart beat and she and Larry were sent for a second opinion.</p>	<p>of having a child, <i>M</i> found herself focused on the future but going nowhere, “running around in circles”. As part of the façade, <i>M</i> was stuck, as an overpowering and obscuring force constantly pulled her back “like a tornado sucking”, returning her to the event that could not become a future reality.</p> <p>(35) With time <i>M</i> realised that something was wrong. Her actions were not authentically lived, but robot-like and socially determined, concealing an inner pain (raw and shattered) as she held onto a false future reality</p> <p>(36) <i>M</i> had keenly looked forward to the future event (having their child) and, with the loss, continued to hold on to all possible links (to the baby that sustained her). These included bought items, as well as the pain and the sad news.</p>
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<p>(37) For M, to let go would be to really get through it, onto the other side, to actually smile again and be able to look at someone's baby and be glad for them and not walk away there and think that that could have been her child, or ask why they were you so lucky to have their child. M saw that she could actually turn the whole event into something beautiful because it was beautiful.</p> <p>(38) It took M nearly three months to get to the point where she could look back and think that she was privileged for seven and a half months. Even if she had suffered this immense loss, there was still something beautiful that came out of it, and she needed to see that.</p> <p>(39) M needed to take things from day to day and not plan ahead and buy kiddie's gifts.</p> <p>(40) But to get to that point, M first had to let go of the negative energy (the pain, anger, misery and conflict) that surrounded the whole event – the sadness that surrounded the whole event; the sadness, the pain, the thinking that it was not fair that someone else had their baby. The sadness was there.</p>	<p>(37) For M, letting go would mean to move through the experience and come out onto the other side and be able to once again to be joyful and to relate positively to others rather than avoiding them and being resentful. M realised that the experience could be beautiful.</p> <p>(38) It took time (three months) for M to get to that point where she could retrospectively accept the loss and recognise the privilege and beauty that she had gained from the experience.</p> <p>(39) M realised that she should live for the present rather than planning and living for the future.</p> <p>(40) M realised that in order to accept the present, she had first to let go of the negative feelings (anger, pain, misery, conflict and resentment) of the past event.</p>
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<p>(41) M and her mother are actually very close, but in that time she did not want her mother close. It actually brought a negative thing into their relationship for the first time. M did not know why, but she did not want her mother to share her pain. M says that maybe she actually protected her mother by not wanting to show her how much she was hurting as she was hurting a great deal.</p> <p>(42) M can let go of the sadness. Even today, M still regrets not having the child with her. The “If only...”, the negative sadness is gone and the regret (positive longing) is there. It does not ache that much.</p> <p>(43) For M it is an achievement that she can still wonder how her child would have looked today and whether he would have been naughty. She pictures him and his daddy walking away and going to the toyshop. She says that it’s fine to do that and a nice thing to think of, because she knows that they will have children in the future. It’s not looking around and looking at that whole year as a disaster anymore.</p> <p>(44) M was able to let go as she tested</p>	<p>(41) M resisted continuing the earlier closeness with her mother and resisted sharing the intense pain with her. M avoided reminders of the mother-child relationship and assumed that she was being protective towards her mother.</p> <p>(42) M continues to let go of the (negative) sadness of the loss (relationship and dreams) and has replaced this with a less painful feeling of regret and hope for the future.</p> <p>(43) M feels a sense of achievement that she can acknowledge the absence of her child and accept the accompanying regret with a positive vision of the future, rather than a negative view of the past.</p> <p>(44) Changing her perspective, and trying it</p>
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<p>viewing things from another angle.</p> <p>(45) For the first three months, M does not think that she was open to any other angle except her anger and disappointment in life and the feeling that she had been done in. M admits that although it happens to other people, she became selfish in her pain. She would ask, “Why me?” Her dad once said to her in relation to a previous incident: “Always ask, Why not me?” She sees the three months as a waste of time in her life and believes that she had made the pain. It went with her to bed and she woke up with it. She had forgotten about the beautiful things, during those seven and a half months.</p> <p>(46) M thought that if she could let go of the pain, she could see things and she could get a message out of it.</p> <p>(47) M repeats that she had a lot of anger. The anger blinded her to the possibilities for making this work. The anger was the opposite of acceptance for her. Anger seemed the only direction. It engulfed her and she allowed it to.</p> <p>(48) About three to four weeks after M lost her baby, she directed her anger towards God. She had always been close</p>	<p>out was how M was able to let go.</p> <p>(45) At first, (for three months), M was not receptive to viewing things differently as she felt angry, disappointed and resentful. She withdrew into herself and the (constant) pain she created. M became oblivious to the beauty of her pregnancy.</p> <p>(46) The pain impeded M from finding new meaning. She realised that she had to let go of the pain.</p> <p>(47) M’s intense feelings of anger overwhelmed her and stood in the way, impeding acceptance, and making acceptance difficult.</p> <p>(48) M had been close to God and had shared a great deal with Him, but her loss had made her very angry and, with time, she</p>
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<p>to God. Religion has always been close to her and her family. M would talk and she would go to God with her problems and sometimes she would also go with her good news. M shared everything and was also verbally very angry towards God. She realised when it started getting worse. It was when it started stretching to three months. Maybe it was because she had all this anger towards God. M actually took her whole attitude back to religion. She wanted an answer.</p> <p>(49) M accepts that the answer really came to her. It was not a dream or a vision but a conscious insight. M believes that it was there all the time but was killed by the negative forces in her and she realises that she actually never saw it. M saw this window opening up with the message, “Never take life for granted”, which she believes must have been there all the time. M repeatedly acknowledges that it must have been there.</p> <p>(50) M carried the message to her religion. It also made it clear for her that there is a positive thing in everything that happens to her and that there will never be an obstacle in front of her that she can’t get over. The answer was to get over this in order to go on. M believed that she had to</p>	<p>was furious with God. She verbally directed her intense feelings of anger towards Him. She confronted her religion and expected an answer.</p> <p>(49) In full awareness, M found her answer in the message, never to assume that life would always be present. The message had always been there, but was obscured by the negativity.</p> <p>(50)M sought to resolve the obstacle and became aware of the positive aspects of the negative experience is empowering. She transfers the insight gained to her religion and other aspects of her life. M believes that she is equipped to deal with all future difficulties that may arise. Finding positive</p>
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<p>find something positive out of the experience and told herself that it could not just be something bad. It could not just be a baby that had to die and be meaningless.</p> <p>(51) M was prepared to open herself up to the message, and only then did she realise that someone like her had forgotten about living for today and that she was rushing into tomorrow. M suddenly realised that she had this life and that she had taken life and everybody around her for granted. After the event M actually started phoning her family more. She presently cannot go through a week without phoning her mom every second day.</p> <p>(52) A constant message came from what happened. This only came to M because of what had happened. She says it's as if her baby gave her this special message to know that "It's fine. Let go. It's fine". She must carry on.</p> <p>(53) With all the personal pain, M realised that her child had died, but she could now give the event meaning. With the death of her child, she approaches life differently. M wants to pour love into life and live life on behalf of her 'child'. She would now say to her 'child' that if he could not live</p>	<p>meaning in the negative experience makes the difference.</p> <p>(51) When M became receptive to the new meaning (message), she realised that she had forgotten about living for the present and had taken life and her relationships for granted. M began to treasure her relationships and resumed regular contact with her significant others.</p> <p>(52) From what had happened, M found a constant and special message to trust and let go. M believes that she has to continue.</p> <p>(53) The pain of the death of her child had become meaningful in that she would now approach life differently. On behalf of her child, M desires to embrace her life with love and meaning ("to pour love into life and live life on behalf of (her) child").</p>
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<p>then she will and she will make it meaningful.</p> <p>(54) M says that it's not nice to experience such a waste of her life to 'shlep' on with all this pain and anger. She thinks that the people around her were aware of this and yet she thought that she was fine. M would think that she was fine and strong and that she could carry on. Later, afterwards when everybody could actually see that she was back and being herself again, people, her parents, often came to her and said that they could see that she had this wall around her. It was anger. M felt done in and cheated. The feeling was strong telling her that she had been done in, and that she was supposed to have this child but had not. She felt that about all the beautiful things and about being pregnant. The negative feelings engulfed her like a dark shadow over her.</p> <p>(55) M did not allow herself to go to the beautiful things as this would feel unfair because she could not justify being happy. M just saw the death and not the pregnancy. M says that she had the sense that she must do something about it, but was passive to her pain. The happy things were a no-no. It was her right to carry this pain and be miserable. The pain became</p>	<p>(54) M regrets having carried the negativity of pain and anger which overwhelmed her like a dark shadow. She feels deceived and let down, for although she had thought that she was coping, others were aware of a barrier around her.</p> <p>(55) M denied herself happiness and beauty and submitted to the pain of the loss that she believed she had to carry. The pain had become her baby and she felt guilty at the thought of letting go.</p>
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<p>her baby and she felt guilty if she thought of letting go.</p> <p>(56) Then, in the next moment, M woke up and realised that she was still in the shadow. It was fine and everyone had to stay away and she was okay. It actually just became worse because she was not prepared to go out for a little bit of sunlight.</p> <p>(57) The moment M did try and did say, that she was going to try something else besides this anger, the shadow just lifted. It was really like she could hear the angels sing. Because really it was like there was light and she was suddenly bombarded with the beautiful things. The intensity was sudden. M was aware but avoided it.</p> <p>(58) The eventual realisation that M was going to be fine was slow but the clarity was sudden. For M, it really was like opening the gift slowly, first pulling the ribbon and then the paper. There were stages that she had to go through to appreciate what there was but she took the light as a gift because of the intensity of the darkness.</p> <p>59) However, this is something that M can only say today by looking back, that the</p>	<p>(56) M accepted her place in the shadow and was not prepared to step into the light.</p> <p>(57) Upon changing her angry attitude, the intense light, that she had avoided poured in with beautiful things accompanied by what seemed to be the singing of angels.</p> <p>(58) Because of the intensity of the darkness that M was in, she accepted the insight and sudden clarity (light) as a gift which she slowly (through stages) moved towards, gradually realising that she would be fine.</p> <p>(59) As M was intensely unhappy at the time, it is only retrospectively that she</p>
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<p>pain and anger came in stages. At the time it was just being miserable. She now believes that from pain something beautiful will come her way.</p> <p>(60) M is also so grateful, not because of what happened but because had the insight to go and look for something there. M does not believe that anything just happens to her and others. If one opens up to it, she says, there is a message there. There is something.</p> <p>(61) M says that the letting-go process takes time. M does not think that three months is such a long time as other people go through things much longer. M also thinks that the fact that they can look forward to having another child some time in the future is positive.</p> <p>(62) It was definitely letting go of the anger. This changed her. It changed her from how she looked at things before being pregnant. It changed her outlook on life.</p> <p>(63) M also realised that because she and Larry have a fantastic relationship, in those three months she started picking up signs that something was wrong (in their relationship) although she thought that she</p>	<p>recognises that the pain and anger occurred in stages. She now understands that something beautiful can evolve from pain.</p> <p>(60) M is grateful that she was able to seek and find a message in the experience and now believes that with a receptive and open attitude, there is a message to be found in all experiences.</p> <p>(61) While the process of letting go took time (three months), approaching the future with the possibility of having another child is positive for M.</p> <p>(62) M realises that letting go of the anger changed her and her perspective on life.</p> <p>(63) Through the relationship with the significant other, M realised that something was wrong. She avoided reminders of the baby and often came into conflict with the significant other.</p>
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<p>was fine. M was avoiding the prams and turned her back when she would see couples coming with their little kids. M and Larry started to quarrel quite often. It would usually come from her side. M realised that something was wrong.</p> <p>(64) It did not happen overnight that M went to look for an answer or a new angle. It took a little while. She wanted to start and then would postpone it to the next day. The acceptance wanted to start as she put her foot in the light. The shadow had become a comfort zone and facing it would be entering the next phase and that would be letting go of the pain but at that stage, the pain became her baby.</p> <p>(65) M says that it was like letting the water go out slowly instead of everything at one shot. She states that everything at one shot would take her back to the early stages where she would fool herself again. She recalls that the futile angry outbursts M realised that it was going to be a slow process getting to where she wanted to be. Applying the new approach was slow because the old approach obviously did not work.</p>	<p>(64) M's attempt to approach things differently was slow. She was initially hesitant to enter the light, as the shadow was comforting to her and she realised that leaving the shadow would be leaving the pain, which, at that stage, had replaced her baby. M was not ready to accept what had happened.</p> <p>(65) M realised that she had to let go gradually, and that it was a slow process getting to where she wanted to be. If she were to do so suddenly, she would return to the early stages of pretence and the futile outbursts of anger.</p>
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<p>(66) It was then that M would want to take time or want to be alone at home. Rather than go out shopping, she would want to sit and think this through. M got to the point of rather playing with the dogs outside and half avoiding being alone, because she knew that there was something she had to face.</p> <p>(67) M repeatedly acknowledges that she had to do something about her attitude. She knew that she had to do something, as she did not like herself anymore. It was easy for her to start picking fights. M knows that she is someone who likes to communicate with people and laugh, but she could see something change in her and did not like it. M thinks that in a sense she was missing the ‘old’ her, and believes that the people around her also did. She did not discuss it that often and was very busy. M realised that she did not want to continue like that. Some people do, but if she had gone on like that, she would have lost more in the end, even jeopardising her marriage and her friends.</p> <p>(68) M is happy. M is really happy. As she faces day-to-day living, it’s not as if she is nonchalant about tomorrow. Not at all. It is just that she is more aware of relationships with people and what she</p>	<p>(66) M wanted to be alone and think about letting go, yet tended to avoid doing so by finding other activities. She knew, however, that there was something she had to look at.</p> <p>(67) M realised that she had to alter her attitude as she missed her earlier gregarious self and did not approve of the new (aggressive) self. M realised that if she were to continue in this manner, her marriage and friendships would be threatened and she feared further loss.</p> <p>(68) M feels really happy in her enriched awareness of the present and her interpersonal relationships.</p>
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<p>says to someone.</p> <p>(69) It is really different for M. She feels enriched. She really feels richer and that's why she says that she can now look back and think that her baby gave her this positive new outlook on life. For those first three months, she had nearly missed out on seeing this little message that was left behind.</p> <p>(70) M adds that perhaps finding that gift is her way of making peace with what happened. She can honestly say that if she could not get a message like this out of it, she would still be stuck in that negative, angry attitude.</p> <p>(71) It was like this little light that suddenly went on for her. The light was for getting an answer This gift worked for her. She can only describe the answer as a light and she can see where she is going and she is not stuck anymore. M believes that she has definitely moved on.</p> <p>(72) Someone also said to her that a special answer would lie in the eyes of her last child because that would be the child that she would never have had if the first one were around. So it's the little things like that. M adds that there is meaning in</p>	<p>(69) M feels enriched by the message that she believes her baby gave her, namely, for a positive outlook on life.</p> <p>(70) The message is a gift that has helped M find peace and direction. She realises that she has definitely moved on for, without it, she would have remained immobilised in her negativity.</p> <p>(71) The message with its meaning served as a gift of light in M's darkness providing her with clarity and direction, helping her to move on.</p> <p>(72) M believes that there is meaning in what she experiences. She has become receptive to others and the impact of someone's words has facilitated her acceptance and willingness to face the future (with optimism).</p>
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<p>everything that happens to her. She actually gets excited thinking that she will going to become pregnant again.</p> <p>(73) M believes that she grew up. It was also a growing up experience for her, as well. M says that it may sound corny, but the value of life really begins and ends with a human being's life. Nothing else. She finds it difficult to really put it into words, but when it comes to a human being's life there is nothing that she can take for granted. If she now thinks back on the little movements she felt, it was so amazing to her. She says that she experienced the ultimate of life and death in one year and it was so big. It was too big an event for her to cope with. That is why she says that it was a growing up process for her, in the sense of what life is about and believes that she now has the tools to cope with her life.</p> <p>(74) Sometimes it's frightening for M to think that she could have missed out on the message if she had not experienced it. That was the price that she had to pay to get to this idea and in a sense it balances it out for her. M acknowledges that it is okay.</p> <p>(75) It was okay to let go because M and</p>	<p>(73) M now recognises the value of life as human life, which cannot be taken for granted. The enormous impact of her feeling life's movements inside her and her encounter with life and death (within a year) has been a growth experience for M. She now believes that she is equipped to deal with her life.</p> <p>(74) M is alarmed at the thought that she could have missed the message, and accepts that her experience was the price she had to pay for the new meaning that she acquired.</p> <p>(75) In naming their child, M could let go</p>
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<p>her husband had to name their child. It was a little boy and his name was Luke, and she could say “good bye” in the sense that he would always be there. Their future children would know about him.</p> <p>(76) M says that she did not just need to carry that pain to remember her child, like she did in the first three months. When she did think of her child it was with a broken heart, with sad and angry thoughts, but now it is nice. M can now think of her child and it is a beautiful idea. M could only get to this point by letting go, by really letting go. Literally, that is what she had to do. M really does not know where she would have been.</p> <p>(77) M’s attempt to put the experience in physical terms is to compare it to a bungee-jump. She says that it’s a ‘free fall’, from where she realised was to where she had to get to – to the extreme points. Hers was the opposite to a bungee-jump. It was from a low to a high, if she could reverse a bungee-jump.</p> <p>(78) The process was there, but when the clarity occurred, M did not have doubts. She says that it was the right way. M sometimes tried to avoid facing it. But the next day she had to start spending more</p>	<p>and take leave of her son Luke, whose name would continue with her and her future family.</p> <p>(76) M realises that the pain (anger and sadness) was unnecessary, but was the link to her child. By letting go of that pain, she can now reflect on her child as a beautiful thought.</p> <p>(77) M experiences moving from one extreme point to another, expressed metaphorically as being a bungee-jump in reverse, moving from a low to a high.</p> <p>(78) M vacillated between the dark and the light. Although she avoided facing the light, once the visibility was there, M had no doubt, that it was the correct route to follow.</p>
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<p>time thinking better. There was dark and there was light. It was a light going on. When it was switched on, it stayed on.</p> <p>(79) M realises that she had made her choice that first morning, but she did not stick to her choice of the first morning. It was only after three months that she could go that way. M now realises that what she did was really to take the darker side, and only after three months did she enter the clarity of the positive side.</p> <p>(80) M adds that to let go was also a guilt feeling because she was almost not allowed to face joy.</p> <p>(81) In the beginning it was like playing with the light switch (on and off), but when it suited her. Then suddenly she did not have an effect on this light switch. It just stayed on. So then it was fine. She still thinks of that feeling and still thrives on it today. She is still on that high and hopes that she is going to stay there.</p> <p>(82) M expects that she will have her ups and downs sometimes, as things lie deeper. It is as if she can face anything coming her way now. To have come through it with an answer like that, M feels that can take anything. She</p>	<p>(79) Upon reflection, M realises that she did not adhere to her initial decision, but had actually entered the darker side. Only after three months was the visibility accessible to her.</p> <p>(80) M did not feel entitled to approach joy and equated letting go with feeling guilty.</p> <p>(81) At first, M's initial attempts did, at her discretion, alternate between facing the dark and facing the light, until the light finally stayed on, providing her with an elevated feeling on which she continues to thrive on and which she wishes to retain.</p> <p>(82) M anticipates emotional fluctuations yet feels empowered with the message. Although unable either to predict the future or her competence in it, she does believe that she can cope with life's challenges.</p>
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<p>anticipates that she will be strong and sad in her life and will accept whatever comes her way. M is aware that the future is not up to her and she cannot sit and say that she can face anything coming her way in the future. She says that she still has to get there to see if she can. M thinks that she will be able to cope and believes that she will not go the negative way in approaching something, but will look first.</p> <p>(83) M thinks that the negative would have come out at a later stage and that she would have broken down at some point in her life. She thinks that it would have been a denial thing if she did not go through the pain and the anger.</p> <p>(84) M says that she definitely went through stages. It was a process. The process was in stages of pain and anger, active processes that really happened. She could not see it at that stage, but looking back now she can see it. At that stage it was all “deurmekaar” (confused). M did think that she was fine and might have skipped any of those stages because M told everybody that she was fine and that life was beautiful. She even took out the movie “Life is beautiful” where she cried with Larry and thought, that she was fine. But M now realises that she wasn’t fine</p>	<p>(83) M believes that she had to experience the negativity (anger and pain), otherwise she would have collapsed in the future.</p> <p>(84) It is only retrospectively that M recognises phases of pain and anger, a process of which she was unaware at the time. Her behaviour (ability to cry through the experience of an event) preserved the belief that she was fine. M now realises that her emotional attitude (reluctance to have children), and her feeling miserable and different, did not concur.</p>
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<p>because of the things she did. She was just miserable and different. M did not want children and did not even want to bring up the issue of having a child. M realises that she was not fine.</p> <p>(85) Letting go for M occurred in stages. It was the little light switch thing that she had mentioned. When it happened, it was clear to her. It was definitely clear. M could feel it and it was great. She felt good about it.</p> <p>(86) M views herself as obviously overprotective now when she sees a pregnant mother. M does not turn her back anymore, and actually wants to tell her that she must take it easy and go to her doctor everyday. M says that it is definitely an attitude change. It's as if it did not come just from within her. She feels that it is a little gift. It definitely balances it out for her because the answer is there and makes her understand it. She can't say that it just came from her. She admits that she obviously would love to say that the gift came from her baby. As she said earlier it was as if she could hear the angels, (imitates chimes) when it happened. It definitely happened.</p> <p>(87) M started looking around her and she</p>	<p>(85) Letting go occurred in phases, where light and dark would vacillate until there was final clarity which provided a sense of well-being. This M continues to enjoy.</p> <p>(86) The message (gift) from her baby has helped M understand, change her attitude and find stability. Though the experience occurred in M's conscious reality, she believes that it was not merely her own creation but something of spiritual significance from an outer reality.</p> <p>(87) M retrospectively realised that she was</p>
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<p>saw people, especially in her kind of work, mothers who had lost their children in accidents. She realised that she was not alone. Looking around her she became aware of other people who were also in pain.</p> <p>(88) M says that she could not go and sit in the corner. It did cross her mind but she believes that no good would have come from it – “Nothing. Zilch”.</p> <p>(89) The process occurred, but not immediately. As M had said, she only realised it three months later. That’s the thing that she said the first morning. There were the choices: sitting in the corner dying or going on with this, facing this and letting go.</p> <p>(90) M had to move through the stages, to get to the brighter side. M thought that morning when she made the decision that she would be fine, but had actually come down but realises that she has come through on the other side. It is a gift and she is definitely stronger now.</p>	<p>not alone in her pain. She became aware of the loss of other mothers and others who were also in pain.</p> <p>(88) Although she had considered it, M believes that withdrawing would have been futile.</p> <p>(89) The process of letting go, was gradual. M recalls the initial choice she had the first morning either to face (let go) the experience and move on, or withdraw (die).</p> <p>(90) Unlike her initial expectation that she would be fine, M now realises that to get to the brighter side she first had to move through different levels and come down before moving through. She feels enriched and empowered</p>
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TABLE II

Participant A: Marlene (M)

Constituents of the Individual Situated Structure of Letting Go

A. Attachment: (1. 2)

M had not taken her pregnancy for granted and was fondly *attached* to the idea of having her baby (which dies in utero). M was aware of a physiological attachment to a human being but found it difficult to let go of a relationship that had only existed in thought and had not become a reality. There had been no mutual sharing of an interpersonal attachment.

B. Loss/ Emptiness: (3. 5. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16.)

The physical *emptiness* made M aware of a physical and emotional loss and she realised that her loss was not merely of an idea, but was also interpersonal. At first, M held on to the concept of her baby, and resisted accepting the loss. She still believed that the baby was alive and living inside her body. The inadequate replacement (in the form of a card with the baby's footprints) confronted her with the reality that she had nothing but emptiness. Returning to the familiar order she knew, M was relieved to discover that though she had lost a future to which she had become attached, she had lost nothing tangible or familiar to her. Facing the reality of her emptiness and loss led to feelings of hopelessness with a need for answers. A quest unfolded, as M sought to find something positive to fill the void.

C. Initial Decision: (4. 7. 8. 9.)

Soon after the loss, M was confronted with having to make a *decision*, either to withdraw (die) or face the loss (live) and move on. Feeling competent, and believing that she could replace what had been lost, M decided to retain control and move on. She was aware of her attachment to others, and in the awareness of the loss, she realised that her attachments were threatened. She resisted withdrawing, for fear of the potential negative and detrimental effects that the overpowering and lengthy

passivity would have on her. Besides, withdrawal meant the negativity of pain and death. The attachment to her spouse influenced her decision and she decided to be positive and move on.

D. Relationship with Others: (10. 17. 41. 63. 67. 87.)

Although withdrawal was an option, M viewed it as a selfish choice. She was aware that others also experience loss and that she was not alone in her pain. Her consideration for, and awareness of, *others* helped her move on. With the belief that she would be fine, M attempted to regain the familiar psychological order and returned to the familiarity of her work, where she could also relate to other people. Once again, she realised that she was not alone, for, at work, M became aware of the loss experienced by others who were also in pain.

Though others were significant, M resisted the closeness that she had previously enjoyed with her mother and evaded sharing the pain of the loss with her. While protective of her mother, M avoided reminders of the mother-child relationship. Nevertheless, conflict arose in the close relationship with the significant other, and she realised that something was wrong and that she had altered. M disliked the aggressive change she saw in herself and she missed the earlier gregarious self with which she was familiar. M realised that she had to do something, for if she were to continue in this manner, her significant relationships (marriage and friendships) were being threatened, so further loss could ensue.

E. Vacillation: (6. 18. 19. 20.)

M believed that she would recover physically, but was aware of an emotionally challenging path ahead. Though she avoided talking about the baby, M would *vacillate* emotionally from one extreme to the other, either controlling her feelings by keeping busy, or overtly expressing what she felt while under the influence of alcohol. M was not satisfied with her behaviour and, although she had become aware of the need to express herself freely, she understood that this was not the solution. She gradually realised (over a

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period of three months) that if she were to find a solution, she would first have to view things differently.

F. Different approach (2nd Decision): (25. 27. 44. 45.)

M decided to approach the loss from a *different* perspective and looked at the past, recalling the joy, beauty and perfection of her pregnancy. Due to her emotional state following the loss, M realised that she had been oblivious to the beauty of her pregnancy, as she withdrew into the pain which prevented her from facing joy and viewing things differently. M had remained attached to a future that could not fulfil itself, and she realised that this led only to sadness and negativity. Ambivalently, M accepted the pain, but realised that she could not continue in this manner, and gradually adopted a new perspective as she hesitantly tested an entirely different approach, accepted her loss and gradually let go. The experience had gained new meaning. From viewing what she had lost, M began to see what she had gained.

G. The Message (21. 22. 23. 24. 26. 39. 49. 51. 71.)

The decision to view things differently provided M with sudden insight which was a clear and conscious experience. She found new meaning in the death of her baby, and, in the realisation that he had not lived, was enriched by the *message* perceived, for her to awaken to life and its meaningful moments, to live for the present and to take the special times out of every day, rather than to live and plan for the future. M began to realise that, due to her haste and focus on the future, she had missed the numerous special moments of her pregnancy and had been oblivious to the present. She had taken her life and relationships for granted. With the new perspective, an awareness unfolded that the fragility of life can neither be captured nor assumed. In the darkness of her pain, the message served as a gift of light that provided her with clarity and direction and helped her to move on. In her quest for gain, the message, with its new meaning, provided an answer that changed her life and vision, offering her a new horizon for which she is very grateful. M has now resumed a regular contact in her relationships with others and treasures her relationships.

H. Holding on: (33. 36. 55. 80.)

M had remained fondly attached to the thought of having their child and, despite the loss, continued to *hold on* to that concept and was reluctant to put things away. M had keenly looked forward to the event and wanted to retain a meaningful link to her baby, so she withdrew into the pain (disappointment, anger, sadness, and resentment) that was constantly with her. She frequently thought about her baby, but the memories, although neither joyful nor fulfilling, continued to sustain her. The pain had become her baby, and she felt guilty at the thought of letting go, as she continued to care. M would deny herself happiness and beauty, and submitted to the pain of the loss which she felt obliged to carry.

I. Façade (31. 32. 34. 35. 84.)

M held on to the pain that was constantly with her, and remained attached to a false future that could not become a reality. She was acutely aware of the unresolved (raw) inner pain which she concealed and evaded acknowledging. M maintained a *façade* and, while she continued with a busy social schedule and appeared to “move on” with her life, her actions were not authentically lived but socially determined, concealing the inner pain. M deceived herself into believing that all was well and that she was fine. There were no warning signs regarding the pain, for the more intense the truth of the pain, the greater the façade: “the heavier the pain, the greater the pretence”. Her ability to cry through an unrelated experience facilitated the deception that she was fine, and she persevered with it. Eventually, however, M found that she was stuck, immobilised and unable to move on, as an overpowering and obscuring force would constantly pull her back, “like a tornado sucking”, repeatedly returning her to the anticipated event that could not become a reality. M found that she was spinning, “running around in circles”, going nowhere and, with time, realised that something was wrong. She became aware that her attitude had changed, as she was reluctant to have children and avoided reminders about the baby. M was not her usual self.

J. Anger and Pain: (45. 46. 47. 48. 59.)

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Following the loss, M withdrew into herself, submitting to the constant pain. The *anger and pain* impeded acceptance of the reality of what had happened, and the negativity prevented her from finding new meaning and seeing the message. M realised that she had to let go of the pain.

M had always been close to God and had shared a great deal with Him, but the loss had made her very angry. With time, she became furious with God and verbally directed her intense feelings of anger towards Him, confronted her religion and expected an answer. It is only retrospectively that M became aware that the pain and anger occurred at intervals.

K. Ambivalence and Vacillation: (56. 57. 58. 61. 64. 65. 66. 70. 78. 79. 81. 85.)

By withdrawing into the negativity (pain, sadness and anger), M remained in the darkness (shadow) which had become her comfort zone. She was not prepared to step into the light, of which she was aware, but nevertheless still knew that she had to face it. M avoided doing so by keeping busy with something else. Although she wanted to be alone and think about entering the light and letting go, she evaded this, believing that if she were to leave the darkness, she would be leaving the pain and the attachment to her baby. M was not ready to accept what had happened. She needed to remain attached, yet desired to move on. Moving to where she wanted to be took time, as M realised that if she were to move on suddenly, she would return to the early stages of pretence and the futile outbursts of anger.

The mobility towards change was slow. In the darkness of her pain, the message served, and continues to serve, as a gift of light, releasing M from the negativity and angry attitude. M was hesitant to enter the light and approach things differently, and her initial attempts were discretionary, as she avoided facing the light. However, the change in her attitude made it possible for the intense light and aspects of beauty to pour in. Letting go occurred only at intervals, as M *vacillated* between facing the dark and facing the light, until there was final clarity, peace and direction to move on. Once the clarity was there and the visibility remained, M had no doubt that it was the correct route to follow and

that she would be fine. The positive view (the possibility of having another child in the future) facilitated the process.

In retrospect, M realises that she had not adhered to her initial decision to move on, but had inadvertently entered the darker side. The message provided her with an elevated feeling, on which she still thrives and which she wishes to retain. The experience transcends the self and is spiritual.

L. Acceptance: (28. 29. 30. 40. 42. 43. 53. 62. 72. 75.)

M realised that in order to accept the present, she had first to let go of the negative feelings (anger, pain, misery, conflict, resentment) that she held on to. By letting go of the negativity, M was able to move on to *acceptance* and pleasant thoughts. She let go of an unrealistic future and ceased to identify with other mothers, accepting the idea that she was not going to be her baby's mother as she had expected. She let go of her "baby", but holds on to his name, a name that will continue with her and her family into the future. M decided to approach her life differently, and the negativity of the pain of the loss acquired new (positive) meaning. She accepted the absence in the present, and replaced the negative sadness of the loss with regret for the past and hope for the future. There was a sense of achievement in accomplishing the less painful perspective.

The changed attitude and space created made it possible for M to be open and receptive to others, where she found fresh sustenance in someone's words. This further facilitated her acceptance and willingness to face the future, as M accepted that from pain (negative), something beautiful (positive) could evolve. On behalf of her baby, M desires to embrace her life with love and live it with meaning. She believes that there is meaning in the things that happened to her.

M. Retrospective View:

(37. 38. 52)

For M, letting go means having *moved* through the experience and come out on the other side. It is being joyful once again and relating positively to others, rather than avoiding them and being resentful. Arriving at the point where she could, in retrospect, accept the

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loss and recognise the privilege and beauty that had come out of the experience, took time (three months). From the experience, M has learned to trust the process and let go. She believes that she has to continue.

(54. 76. 83.)

M regrets the *pain and anger* she held on to, which overwhelmed her like a dark shadow. She feels deceived and let down, for although she had thought that she was fine, she realises that others were aware of a barrier around her. Nevertheless, M accepts that the pain (anger and sadness) was a necessary link to her child and inevitable. Had she not experienced the negativity, she believes that she would have experienced a collapse in the future.

(77. 88. 89. 90.)

M recalls her initial decision not to withdraw and believes that had she done so, it would have been futile, for the *process* was gradual as she went through different phases. To get to the brighter side, M had first to move through different levels, and had come down before moving through. M has moved from one extreme point to another, metaphorically like a bungee-jump in reverse, from a low to a high. The process has enriched and empowered her.

(60. 70. 74.)

The *message* facilitated M's mobility, for without it she would have remained stuck in the negative angry attitude she had held on to. The message, with its positive meaning, had, like a light, entered her dark world of pain and provided relief, peace and direction. M is grateful that she sought and found the message, and believes that, with a receptive and open attitude, a message is to be found in all experiences. M is alarmed at the possibility of having missed the message, and accepts that the experience was the price she had to pay for the positive meaning which she received.

(73. 86.)

The message bears *spiritual significance* for M, helping her to understand, find stability and change her attitude. She now treasures the present and her relationships, and considers the value of life as human life, which she no longer takes for granted. The

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enormous impact of her close encounter with life and death – within a year – has been a growth experience for her.

(50. 68. 69. 82.)

The insight gained from the *message* and its positive meaning is transferred to M's religion and other aspects of her life. M looks to the future in the awareness that she cannot predict either what is to be, or her ability to deal with it. Nevertheless, she feels positive about the future and trusts that all impending difficulties can be overcome, as something meaningful and positive can be found in her experiences. M anticipates emotional fluctuations, yet feels empowered and enriched by her new positive outlook. She feels competent and confident to deal with the challenges of her life.

TABLE III

Participant A: Marlene (M)

Situated Narrative Description of Letting Go

M does not take the event of her pregnancy for granted and, with her spouse, is positively focused on the future and the joy of having their child. She is aware of a physiological and conceptual attachment to a human being, but the unexpected loss of the baby replaces the anticipated joyful event.

At first, M remains fondly attached to the thought of having her baby and, despite the loss, continues to hold on to the idea. She continues to believe that the baby is a living part of her, in their mutual oneness, and finds it difficult to let go even of a relationship that had existed only in thought, with no interpersonal sharing. However, with the loss, the experience of physical emptiness makes her aware of a physical and interpersonal loss that is emotional. Initially, she holds on to the concept of her baby and resists accepting the loss, but having moved through the processes of pregnancy and birth, she realises that she is left with nothing but emptiness, and is confronted with the reality of her loss. The oneness shared will not continue interpersonally as expected. M becomes aware that she has lost a future, but is relieved to know that she has lost nothing tangible or familiar to her. With the awareness of her loss and sense of emptiness, feelings of hopelessness emerge, and, in her need to find something positive to fill the void, M seeks answers and a quest unfolds.

Soon after the loss, M is confronted with having to make a decision, either to withdraw (die) or face the loss (live) and move on. Feeling optimistic in her view of the future (to replace what she has lost) and competent regarding her ability to cope with what had happened, M decides to be positive and move on. The attachment to her spouse, who has shared the experience with her, influences her decision. She resists withdrawing for fear of the impact it would have on him and the significant others in her life. Although

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withdrawal is an option, she considers it to be a selfish move that will be potentially painful and detrimental. She recognises her attachment to others and decides to move on.

M's consideration for the significant others (spouse and parents) in her life promotes her decision not to withdraw, but to move on. She realises that she is not alone in her pain, and seeks to return to the familiarity of the psychological order she knew. She returns to work. At her workplace she identifies with others who have also experienced loss. She enjoys relating to others at work and initially believes that she will be fine.

M continues to hold on and is reluctant to detach herself, seeking instead to retain the links to her baby, whom she frequently thinks of with painful memories that continue to sustain her. She withdraws into the pain and negativity (anger, disappointment and resentment) that is constantly with her, and the pain has become her baby. She feels guilty at the thought of letting go of the pain, for to do so would mean that she would be letting go of her baby. She denies herself happiness and beauty, and submits to the pain of the loss which she feels obliged to carry.

The attachment to her baby continues, as M withdraws into the pain (sadness and anger) and remains in the darkness (shadow), which becomes a comfort zone. Although she believes that she will recover physically, she is aware of an emotionally challenging path ahead. M resists all reminders of the loss and evades discussing it, even with her mother, with whom she had previously been very close. M believes that she is protecting her mother from the pain, while the deception and façade continue.

To avoid talking about the loss, M keeps busy, yet finds that she vacillates from one emotional extreme to the other, either controlling her feelings or overtly expressing what she feels, particularly when under the influence of alcohol. Although M becomes aware of the need to express herself freely, she disapproves of her negative behaviour and realises that this is not the answer.

M keeps busy and continues to hold on to the pain that is constantly with her. She attempts to conceal and protect the inner pain that she feels intensely, creating a façade as she continues to pretend and only seems to move on with her life. Her behaviour is

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socially determined and she does not live authentically, but deceives herself into believing that she is fine. The absence of any warning signs helps preserve the deception. M persevered with the façade, for “the heavier the pain, the greater the pretence”. Her ability to cry through an unrelated experience further reinforces the deception that she has recovered. Eventually, however, M finds that she is stuck, blocked and immobilised, unable to move forward as an overpowering and obscuring force constantly pulls her back, “like a tornado sucking”, repeatedly returning her to the reality of what she has not achieved. M finds that she is entrapped, “running around in circles”, going nowhere. With time, she realises that something is wrong.

M becomes aware that she is not her usual self, as she is now reluctant to have children and avoids reminders about the baby. Conflict arises in the close relationship with her spouse, and she becomes aware that she has changed. Feelings of aggression arise in her relationship with God, with whom she had always been close and had shared a great deal. With time, she becomes furious with God, and verbally directs her intense feelings of anger towards Him. She confronts her religion and demands an answer to what has happened. She misses her earlier gregarious self, and disapproves of the aggressiveness that has emerged. M realises that she has to make a change, for continuing in this manner will threaten her meaningful relationships (marriage and friendships), and she fears further loss. With the threat of further loss, M decides to view things differently and moves from the negativity (anger, pain, misery conflict and resentment) that she held on to and recalls the positive aspects (joy, beauty and perfection) of her experience of the pregnancy. She realises that, due to her haste and focus on the future, she had missed the numerous special moments of her pregnancy.

The decision to view things differently provides M with a message that appears in her conscious awareness. The change in her attitude and the quest for new meaning regarding her baby’s death, provide her with the answer that she was looking for. The answer is a message for her to awaken to life and its meaningful moments, to live for the present, rather than to live and plan for the future.

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The process towards change is slow and, in the darkness of her pain, the message serves as a gift of light which liberates her from the entrapment. She realises that she has to face the light, but avoids doing so. At first, M is not willing to accept the light, for this would mean having to accept what had happened to her, and having to let go of the pain and darkness which have replaced her baby. This would mean that she would have to let go of her baby and she is reluctant to do so. M resists the change and, although she wants to be alone to think about entering the light, she evades this as well. M realises that if she suddenly has to let go, she will return to the early stages of pretence and the futile outbursts of anger. Moving to where she wants to be takes time.

Her initial attempts to enter the light and approach things differently are cautious. Letting go occurs in phases as she vacillates between anger and pain, between facing the dark and facing the light. The vacillation continues until there is final clarity, peace and direction to move on. Once there is clarity and stability, she has no doubt that she is on the correct route. M trusts that she will be fine. The change in her attitude makes it possible for the intense light and beautiful things to pour in. Her positive view of the future facilitates the process and, in her quest for gain, the new meaning provided by the message changes her life and provides her with a new horizon, for which she is very grateful. While the attachment is retained, new meaning is linked to her experience of loss. M hesitantly tests the entirely different approach and gradually accepts the new perspective. As she comes to terms with her loss and finds new meaning, M is able to let go.

She realises that she had been prevented from seeing the positive message that she now believes was always there. In retrospect, she realises that her negativity had impeded her acceptance of what had happened. Though initially reluctant to do so, M moves on to *acceptance* and, with the acceptance, she is able to accept the present and let go of an unrealistic future and acknowledge the sadness of the loss. In the process, she becomes aware of hope for the future. She is able to have pleasant thoughts and find resolution, accepting the idea that she is not going to be her baby's mother as expected. Although she does let go of her "baby", she remains attached to his name with which she will enter the future. A sense of continuity is retained. The pain of the loss acquires new meaning and, as M decides to approach her life differently, she feels a sense of achievement. From

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viewing what she had lost, M begins to see what she has gained. She resumes regular contact in her interpersonal relationships and begins to treasure them, no longer assuming that they will always be there.

M's changed attitude also makes it possible for her to become receptive to others, and she finds fresh sustenance in the meaning of someone's words which reinforces her acceptance and her willingness to face the future. With the new perspective, M realises that from pain, something beautiful can evolve. She accepts that the fragility of life cannot be taken for granted and, on behalf of her baby, desires to embrace her life with love and live it with meaning. She believes that there is meaning in the things that happened to her.

Arriving at the point where she could, in retrospect, accept the loss and recognise the beauty that had come out of the experience takes time. She realises that letting go was a gradual *process*, where she had first to enter the darkness before moving into the light. In retrospect, she becomes aware of the process and realises that she had not adhered to her initial decision to move on, but had inadvertently entered the darker side. Letting go is a shift from one extreme point to another, moving from feelings of deep sadness to feelings of elation. She had *moved* through the experience to the other side and was joyful once again, relating positively to others, rather than avoiding them and being resentful. With the new meaning, M finds resolution, and is provided with a sense of enrichment and empowerment, a feeling on which she still thrives and wishes to retain. The experience is transformational. M has learned to trust (the process of life) and let go.

M regrets the *pain and anger* that she held on to. There were phases of pain and anger. Although the negativity had enveloped her in darkness, it was a necessary link to her child and an inevitable part of the process. She feels deceived and let down for not seeing the barrier around her.

In the process, the new positive meaning gained facilitates M's transition and mobility, liberating her from the entrapment of the negative angry attitude that had enveloped her and which she had held on to. In the darkness of her pain, the positive meaning of the

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message is a light that provides relief, peace and direction. She is grateful for having sought and found the “message” with its new meaning, and now believes that significance can be found in all experiences. She accepts that the experience was the price she had to pay for the message.

The message bears spiritual significance which M transfers to her religion and other aspects of her life. M finds stability and changes her attitude, with a greater appreciation for life and existing relationships. The awareness of the present also appears to have increased. M is optimistic about the future and trusts that she can overcome all future difficulties that may confront her. M feels empowered, enriched, competent and confident to deal with the challenges in her life.

TABLE IV

Participant A: Marlene (M)

General Situated Structure of Letting Go

The expected (birth) event is significant and, in anticipation of the event, there is a positive focus on the future, when the new significant other will enter the world of the self. In waiting for the future, there is awareness of a physiological and conceptual bond to a human being. The mother-to-be feels a sense of oneness with the anticipated arrival of her baby. The event, considered to be joyful, is, however, suddenly replaced by loss.

Despite the physical loss, the concept of the new significant other (baby) continues to be held on to, but the experience of physical emptiness confronts the self with the reality of a physical and interpersonal loss. Letting go of a relationship that had not been enjoyed as a shared reality, but had only existed in thought, is difficult. Confrontation with the physical loss and the feeling of emptiness brings to awareness both the physical and interpersonal meaning of the loss. Resistance to accepting the loss arises, along with an accompanying emotionality, but, with the emptiness following the waiting period, the loss becomes a reality. Loss of the anticipated future is acknowledged, but with relief in the knowledge that no familiar attachment has been lost. Feelings of emptiness and hopelessness emerge, with the need for something positive to fill the void. A quest unfolds.

Soon after the loss, a decision confronts the self, either to withdraw and accept death or face the loss, live and let go. The emotionality of the experience is avoided and, with the belief of being able to cope and optimism regarding the future, the decision is to be positive and move on. The self justifies its decision not to withdraw, a step considered selfish and potentially painful and detrimental to the significant others with whom the experience has been shared.

Following the decision, the familiarity of the known psychological order is returned to with the pleasure resumed of relating to others. In the familiar environment, the self

identifies with others who have also experienced loss. There is the initial belief of competence.

Holding on continues, with a reluctance to detach the self from the loss of the baby. Links are retained, as painful memories continue to sustain the self, while the presence of the pain and negativity replace the absence of what was meaningful (the baby). There is attachment to the pain experienced, as it has replaced the baby, and feelings of guilt arise at the thought of letting go. Happiness and joyful thoughts are denied, and the pain is carried with a sense of obligation.

Withdrawal into the pain and negativity envelops the self in darkness which paradoxically becomes a comfort zone. Although there is trust in a physical recovery, an emotionally challenging path is envisaged. All reminders of the loss are evaded particularly those associated with parenting relationships. In the continued effort to avoid reminders of the loss, activities increase. Nevertheless, the self vacillates in emotions and behaviour from one extreme to another. Emotions are either controlled or expressed overtly, particularly when under the influence of alcohol. Although the need for self-expression becomes evident, there is disapproval of the negative behaviour connected with achieving this.

While holding on to the pain continues, attempts are made to conceal and protect what lies hidden. A façade emerges that conceals the truth. Behaviour is not authentic, but socially determined, with a deceptive belief regarding personal competence and stability: the heavier the pain, the greater the pretence characterising the behaviour that is false, behaviour which is not lived in truth. The evident ability to behave “normally” reinforces the perseverance in the deception. Eventually, the self becomes stuck, blocked and immobilised, unable to move forward, as an overpowering and obscuring force constantly returns the self, in defiance of personal will, to the reality of the loss and the reality of the present. With the entrapment, the self experiences a sense of spinning and going nowhere. With time, awareness increases that something is wrong.

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Intense aggressive feelings arise, and are expressed in the close relationship with the significant other, as well as in the close relationship with God. Religion is confronted, with demands for an answer. The different and negative sense of self emerges with a disapproval of the aggressiveness and a desire for the premorbid self. The self is confronted with the need for change, with an increasing awareness that to continue in the present manner threatens existing meaningful relationships. Further loss is feared. With the threat of further loss, the self decides to view things differently and move from the pain and negativity that had been held on to.

The change in attitude and quest for new meaning provide an answer which is perceived as a message, requesting for a greater awareness of life and its meaningful moments: to live for the present, rather than to live and plan for the future. There is an increasing realisation that, due to haste and a focus on the future, the numerous special moments of the present were not evident to the self. The joy and beauty of life – moments in the present, and meaningful relationships – had been taken for granted.

Although the message is accepted, the process towards change is slow. In the darkness of the pain, the message serves as a gift of light which liberates the self from the entrapment. Although there is awareness of the light, the self avoids facing the light, which means acceptance of what had happened. There is resistance to letting go of the meaningful, though painful, attachment that had replaced the absent baby. Change is resisted and, although there is a need to consider entering the light, such a step is evaded. Besides, there is the awareness that to suddenly let go can lead the self to return to the early stages of pretence and the futile outbursts of anger. The approach is gradual, and making the change takes time.

Initial attempts to enter the light and approach things differently are cautious. The entirely different approach is tested hesitantly, and the new perspective gradually accepted. Letting go occurs in phases, with swings between anger and pain, between facing the dark and facing the light. Vacillation between the dark and the light continues until clarity is attained, providing peace and direction. With the arising stability, there is conviction of being on the correct route, while the self trusts that it can continue. The

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change in attitude makes it possible for beauty to be perceived in the intense light. There is an awareness of the presence of beauty in the new world, and a positive view of the future facilitates the process. In the quest for gain, the new meaning provided by the message is significant, providing the self with a new horizon. With the new meaning acquired, the attachment is retained as it continues to link with the experience of loss. With the acceptance of the loss, new meaning emerges, along with a capacity to let go. The future is entered with a sense of continuity.

In retrospect, there is awareness that the negativity had prevented the self from finding new meaning. Although the positive message was always there, there is awareness that negativity impedes acceptance of what had happened. Despite the initial reluctance to do so, letting go of an unrealistic future makes acceptance of the present possible. Although the loss is accepted with sadness, hope for the future emerges. As true feelings are revealed, clarity is provided. With the discovery of new meaning, the approach to life is different, as pleasant thoughts enter consciousness. From viewing what had been lost, there is new awareness of what has been gained along with a sense of having encountered life and its meaning. The value of interpersonal relationship is accepted and resumed. Awareness of the positive change provides a sense of achievement. Positive and sustaining influences reinforce the acceptance with a willingness to face the future. The changed attitude makes the self more willing to relate to the world and become receptive to its influences. Beliefs and values are influenced by the experience of change.

Despite the negativity experienced, having moved through the experience provides the self with the capacity to view what is positive. Upon reflection, there is regret for the pain and anger that was held on to, but this is accepted as a necessary initial link to what was to be a new significant other. Retrospectively awareness unfolds that the pain and anger occurred in phases, but the self feels deceived for not having been aware of the truth. The process of letting go is acknowledged as timeous and gradual, for, before moving into the light, darkness has first to be entered. Despite initial efforts to avoid, the darkness, this is an inevitable part of the process. In the darkness of the pain, the positive meaning of the message is a light that provides relief, peace and direction. The meaning gained facilitates transition and mobility, liberating the self from the entrapment and the

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negativity that was held on to. The negativity of the experience is accepted as a necessary exchange for the positive message found.

Letting go is accepted as a shift from one extreme point to another, a mobility from feelings of deep sadness to feelings of elation. Moving through the experience to the other side is to re-experience pleasure and relate positively to others, rather than being negative and avoiding them. Finding resolution provides the self with a sense of enrichment and empowerment, a positive feeling that the self thrives on and wishes to retain.

The message bears spiritual significance which is transferred to religion and other aspects of life, as stability is found. The change in attitude accompanies a greater appreciation for life and existing relationships. Awareness of the present increases with a greater optimism regarding the future. The experience is transformational. Successful resolution of the process of letting go and the meaning discovered facilitates the acceptance of life. There is gratitude for the new meaning as life-beliefs are altered, with fresh conviction that future difficulties can be overcome. Feelings of empowerment, enrichment and competence emerge with a sense of confidence to deal with the challenges of life.

Participant B: Ben (B)

Situated Narrative Description of Letting Go

A family man, B works for Correctional Services as a psychologist from eight to five daily. He earns a monthly salary which makes it possible for him to live a stable and predictable life.

B's employment provides him with a feeling of safety and security, yet denies him freedom. The institution where he works has demilitarised and, although the new context liberates him emotionally, ironically, he also feels trapped where he is. He believes that his presence and contributions are not being appreciated, and he feels abused and professionally rejected. In the changed context, B reflects on who he is and realises that he is different to the others. He does not feel that he belongs there and wants to leave.

There is conflict, doubt and tension about leaving his work, but letting go begins with his decision to leave. He questions himself regarding his decision, and wonders whether he is being selfish and inconsiderate of others. With his decision to leave his place of employment, B decides to emigrate, and becomes aware of horizons beyond his familiar world. Admission to the country of his choice is conditional, as he is expected to meet certain criteria. He accepts being rejected initially, a necessary step, he believes, for the greater opportunity he pursues.

B is excited and motivated about leaving and looks forward to being of value again through fulfilling his vocation and making meaningful contributions. The security of a salary no longer seems necessary. He is willing to make a complete change, and, although he is aware of risks, he nevertheless trusts that he will continue to survive.

Before his departure, B returns to say goodbye and rekindle the memories of his past with which will continue to sustain him. The close contact he had with family

and relatives has diminished, and has been replaced with meaningful attachments to certain places and people. He returns to his past and visits the places of his birth, the places of his childhood and of earlier youth. B retraces the early steps and paths that he had taken in his life, and relives the journey of his earlier years. The trip is meaningful to him, particularly as he says goodbye in a personal, rather than in a socially expected, manner. During his visit, B is reassured that, in the consistent diversity and newness of life, the foundations and familiarity of past structures do continue. He finds the visit a positive experience and leaves with meaningful memories that he finds empowering. The memories retain attachments to the pleasure of the places and people he knew and loved, and to which he would like to return in the future. Rekindling the early memories of people and concrete places revives his link to foundations, the foundations of his childhood. B's memories are fundamental to his experience of letting go.

The initial motivator for B to change is spiritual. As a Christian and as someone who is religious, B is reminded that the most important aspects of life are spiritual rather than material. In his journey, B identifies with Christ as his leader, and decides to follow him by adhering to the values and beliefs of his faith. B is reminded of the spiritual journey of being a Christian. He is reminded of the meaning of letting go of material attachments and securities by submitting to spiritual values. A religious practice conveys the significance of a spiritual (Easter) message that, before he can experience new life, he has to sacrifice and let go. In identifying with Christ and accepting his religious beliefs, the unknown path on which B embarks becomes more familiar to him.

Upon accepting that material attachments are not of primary importance, B is able to relax (let go), accepting himself beyond his regular values and the context of daily living. He becomes aware of not being a failure and accepts his spiritual calling in serving others. Throughout the process, the focal point of serving "the other" remains a beacon to B and he decides to refocus on it once he has relinquished the material or "false" securities to which he is attached. It is not easy relinquishing the material securities, but, rather than think of himself and dwell on his feelings, B

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considers others and decides to submit to his spiritual (Christian) principles which will continue to provide him with a sense of security.

Looking beyond the move into the future, B's intention is to continue with his desire to serve others and to continue to commit himself to his belief. He would like to help others with the knowledge that he has gained through the experience and the discovery he has made – “To let go when it is necessary to let go” – particularly as the lived experience that he has come to know it as, rather than in its cognitive context. B has also discovered that an open attitude with a willingness to be receptive to spiritual paths, has drawn him closer to his purpose in life. The securities of material attachments have had to be relinquished. Letting go is a challenge and not easy. The experience is a fearful leap into the vastness and unpredictability of space, like “jumping from a plane before the parachute opens”.

Although the material attachments are considered to be false, his ability to retain these attachments provides relief. B realises that eventually almost all material attachments will have to be relinquished, but that the process will be gradual. In facing the emptiness of the unknown, B assures himself that securities are based on spiritual aspects. In the absence of the tangible securities, B is guided by his spiritual values and principles. He considers others rather than thinking of himself, and this, together with his spiritual beliefs, facilitates the move. He understands that the process of letting go is not continuous, and accepts that there is a time to hold on and a time to let go – a time for constancy and a time for change. Holding on is stabilising and a necessary restraint and attachment before the leap of letting go. Repeated change, with its entry into the unknown, has to be resisted.

Having emigrated, B relates to his new environment and attempts to find a balance between the positive and negative aspects of the change. His negative perceptions are that he feels that he is still an outsider who does not yet belong. He desires acceptance but is aware that he still has to prove his credibility in the new country. His position seems precarious, as he also has to reassure the significant others in his life that he can be

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trusted regarding the choice he has made and also regarding the safety and security of the new environment that they are due to enter.

With relief, B acknowledges the dominance of the positive aspects regarding the change and this motivates him further. He feels that he is accepted within his work context regarding his professional identity and vocational commitment. This is a positive change from the feelings that pertained before, of neither belonging nor being valued. He also believes that the new environment can positively accommodate his children's needs, and he envisages a happy family life in the new country. B experiences a new world.

Aware of the change around him, B feels a greater sense of freedom and security and finds that he is less anxious. He recognises the paradox that he finds regarding this security which, with its negative aspects of control, excludes him, whilst simultaneously providing him with a positive sense of security that he believes he will one day be part of. He looks forward to sharing in the protection that others presently have, and to restoring a sense of belonging and of oneness.

On a social and interpersonal level, B begins to feel accepted and supported and is creating new friendships as he begins to relate to others. He enjoys the familiarity of family attachments, but finds that he still has to orientate himself by familiarising himself with the new environment. He makes a continuous effort to adapt to changes regarding weather, time and general behaviour, so that he may soon be like the rest of his new compatriots. B continues to relate to his different environment and make it more familiar and trusting so that he will soon be integrated in the country of his choice. The perceived dominance of positive aspects in the present, and the potential for positive aspects in the future, provide him with optimism.

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B's employment provides him with a feeling of safety and security, yet denies him freedom. The institution where he works has demilitarised and, although the new context liberates him emotionally, ironically, he also feels trapped where he is. He believes that his presence and contributions are not being appreciated, and he feels abused and professionally rejected. In the changed context, B reflects on who he is and realises that he is different to the others. He does not feel that he belongs there and wants to leave.

There is conflict, doubt and tension about leaving his work, but letting go begins with his decision to leave. He questions himself regarding his decision, and wonders whether he is being selfish and inconsiderate of others. With his decision to leave his place of employment, B decides to emigrate, and becomes aware of horizons beyond his familiar world. Admission to the country of his choice is conditional, as he is expected to meet certain criteria. He accepts being rejected initially, a necessary step, he believes, for the greater opportunity he pursues.

B is excited and motivated about leaving and looks forward to being of value again through fulfilling his vocation and making meaningful contributions. The security of a salary no longer seems necessary. He is willing to make a complete change, and, although he is aware of risks, he nevertheless trusts that he will continue to survive.

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considers others and decides to submit to his spiritual (Christian) principles which will continue to provide him with a sense of security.

Looking beyond the move into the future, B's intention is to continue with his desire to serve others and to continue to commit himself to his belief. He would like to help others with the knowledge that he has gained through the experience and the discovery he has made – “To let go when it is necessary to let go” – particularly as the lived experience that he has come to know it as, rather than in its cognitive context. B has also discovered that an open attitude with a willingness to be receptive to spiritual paths, has drawn him closer to his purpose in life. The securities of material attachments have had to be relinquished. Letting go is a challenge and not easy. The experience is a fearful leap into the vastness and unpredictability of space, like “jumping from a plane before the parachute opens”.

Although the material attachments are considered to be false, his ability to retain these attachments provides relief. B realises that eventually almost all material attachments will have to be relinquished, but that the process will be gradual. In facing the emptiness of the unknown, B assures himself that securities are based on spiritual aspects. In the absence of the tangible securities, B is guided by his spiritual values and principles. He considers others rather than thinking of himself, and this, together with his spiritual beliefs, facilitates the move. He understands that the process of letting go is not continuous, and accepts that there is a time to hold on and a time to let go – a time for constancy and a time for change. Holding on is stabilising and a necessary restraint and attachment before the leap of letting go. Repeated change, with its entry into the unknown, has to be resisted.

Having emigrated, B relates to his new environment and attempts to find a balance between the positive and negative aspects of the change. His negative perceptions are that he feels that he is still an outsider who does not yet belong. He desires acceptance but is aware that he still has to prove his credibility in the new country. His position seems precarious, as he also has to reassure the significant others in his life that he can be

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trusted regarding the choice he has made and also regarding the safety and security of the new environment that they are due to enter.

With relief, B acknowledges the dominance of the positive aspects regarding the change and this motivates him further. He feels that he is accepted within his work context regarding his professional identity and vocational commitment. This is a positive change from the feelings that pertained before, of neither belonging nor being valued. He also believes that the new environment can positively accommodate his children's needs, and he envisages a happy family life in the new country. B experiences a new world.

Aware of the change around him, B feels a greater sense of freedom and security and finds that he is less anxious. He recognises the paradox that he finds regarding this security which, with its negative aspects of control, excludes him, whilst simultaneously providing him with a positive sense of security that he believes he will one day be part of. He looks forward to sharing in the protection that others presently have, and to restoring a sense of belonging and of oneness.

On a social and interpersonal level, B begins to feel accepted and supported and is creating new friendships as he begins to relate to others. He enjoys the familiarity of family attachments, but finds that he still has to orientate himself by familiarising himself with the new environment. He makes a continuous effort to adapt to changes regarding weather, time and general behaviour, so that he may soon be like the rest of his new compatriots. B continues to relate to his different environment and make it more familiar and trusting so that he will soon be integrated in the country of his choice. The perceived dominance of positive aspects in the present, and the potential for positive aspects in the future, provide him with optimism.

TABLE III

Participant C: Penny (P)

Situated Narrative Description of Letting Go

P's situation of letting go arises in her leaving the home she lived in for thirty years. Prior to any reflective thought of moving, P is content in her familiar routine and the at-homeness of her domestic world. She is settled in the home that she and the family have, over the years, developed to accommodate themselves and their needs. P continues to move along the familiar route and in the known routine of her world. She does not think of letting go, but, with a long-term illness, is confined to her home and experiences a sense of 'darkness and depression'.

P finds the noise from the neighbouring school intrusive, while its intensity and unpredictability become absolutely intolerable. Despite her efforts to change her situation, she can do nothing, and, with time, P finds herself trapped and unable to leave the situation. She feels helpless and, in her frustration, becomes destructively angry. In addition to her loss of agency (illness), the intrusion is too much for her to endure. Escalation of the intrusion is so devastating and unbearable that all she can do is just scream. With time, P feels that her personal stability is being threatened and, in her decision to move, she needs the support of her significant other (spouse).

P is unable to change the detrimental situation in which she finds herself and decides to move. She looks for, and finds, a place that she considers ideal and suitable to her needs. It meets her criteria of peace, a view and the need to be close to nature. With her significant other, she buys a new place. P is excited about the move and believes that she has found the answer, but the move does not materialise. She realises that the criteria only reflected her personal ideals, and that the new place was not suitable for the rest of the family. With feelings of sadness, she cancels the sale.

P resists moving only for personal reasons, and attempts to guard against her decision being self-centred. In her decision to move, P considers the needs of her significant

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other, as well as the needs of her children. The needs of the family have changed over the years, and their present home is no longer suitable. Though her children are ready to move, P seeks the commitment and support of her significant other regarding her decision to move.

In the context in which P finds herself, she feels trapped and intruded upon. She is confined to where she is and not able to move on. P feels helpless, frustrated and destructively angry. She realises that her personal stability and sense of self are being threatened and she needs to go. She also understands that there is no reason for her to continue where she is but, at the thought of moving, P becomes resistant, angry and resentful that, because of the unbearable intrusion, she and the family have to leave their home.

Committing herself to the final decision to move is agonising for P, who, over time, repeatedly thinks of leaving. She constantly considers the move, reflects, ponders and thinks about the following step. To P, it is the process of committing herself to the decision that is the actual move rather than the move itself, which is nevertheless physically unpleasant. P finds that it is the commitment to the final decision that is the actual turning point of letting go. To P, “The decision (is) the move”, but with the decision there is ambivalence and conflict, for at the thought of deciding to leave, P then changes her mind and accepts that she should stay.

In making up her mind, P finds that she vacillates in her thoughts, and repeatedly moves backwards and forwards before taking the final step. Arriving at the decision is gradual and takes place over a lengthy period. P becomes aware that her spouse is also going through the same lengthy process of moving back and forth. She realises that she is not alone in her experience. For P, however, the vacillating experience depends on the level of intrusion that is present, as she feels the presence or absence of the intrusion in a physically experiential manner reflected in her breathing pattern, which is affected according to whether the intrusion is approaching or receding in relation to her. For example, in the absence (weekends/holidays) of the intrusion, the air seems clear and easy to breathe, but with the approaching presence (new school day) of the intrusion, the air gradually becomes more difficult to inhale.

In the search for a new home, P's priority is to find peace, although she also desires to have a view, trees and spacious rooms. To find this, P realises that she will have to move to a new area, and she feels ambivalent about leaving the familiar area she knows. Although her home does not have a view, she does enjoy a meaningful relationship with its natural environment, a relationship she intends to continue in the new area she might find. Nevertheless, she feels anxious at the prospect of finding this meaningful relationship in the absence of her spouse, who differs from her in this regard.

P seeks a sense of continuity and makes a concerted effort to continue the meaningful relationship she has with nature in preparing for the transition. Once aware that she will leave her home, P evades long-term commitments and finds a manner of retaining her meaningful attachments throughout the transitional process. P continues with the (planting) activity she enjoys, but retains the attachment to the natural objects (trees) and the relationship these offer. Throughout the process P retains the attachment and sense of continuity that is important to her. (Instead of planting trees in the garden, she begins to plant in pots that she can save and carry with her to her new destination.)

In the need for continuity and to defend against loss, P hopes to maintain the familiar psychological order she knows. With ambivalence, P acknowledges the anger and resentment she continues to feel regarding the move. Having lived in her home for thirty years, it is with tremendous sadness that P looks back and recalls the meaningful relationship she enjoyed with the natural environment (trees), and she realises that she has left this behind.

In the new area, P finds an order that is not familiar to her. She has to adjust to changes in time, distance and space, as well as to the new interpersonal aspects of a new world. The psychological order is different to that which she has known. Similarly, in the new environment, P finds the people different to her, and she feels foreign and displaced in relation to them, and yet ambiguously, she also becomes aware of similarities between her and them. Paradoxically, although P does not feel at one with the new people she has met, she does feel favourably disposed towards them. She acknowledges and appreciates

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their mutual respect for privacy and interpersonal space, where contact is voluntary rather than intrusive. She finds a similarity with them in his regard.

P is resistant to the term letting go, which she believes does not acknowledge the personal experience involved. Committing herself to the process of letting go is a major decision for her, particularly in the need to define her personal *space*. P is constantly in the presence of others, and desires personal space and privacy. Having arrived in the new world, P feels victorious and experiences indescribable joy in having acquired her own (auditory and physical) space that cannot be intruded upon. Believing the decision to be self-centred is now resisted, as P justifies her need for the space as being due to the fact that she is constantly in the presence of others. Once again, ambiguities arise, for, although P seeks to define personal space, she seeks to retain the relationships she has. There is anxiety at the thought of being isolated.

To find personal meaning and order in her new space (home), P has to clear the new space of its existing foreign meaning deriving from stories regarding the previous residents. She is resentful that the stories of the earlier residents were shared with her, as their meaning still lingers. P seeks to become familiar in the new space and to make the new home her own by gradually personalising its newness. She eclectically removes what she cannot accept, and begins to make her new environment familiar to her. P realises that personalising the new world (home and garden) is going to be a lengthy process, particularly as she would like to create personal meaning (by being receptive to the people/animals).

In the new environment, P finds the view that she had hoped for, but despite her efforts to hold on to what she finds, P soon experiences the loss (of the view) which devastates her. The loss revives the earlier struggle and returns her to the feelings of helplessness, frustration and violent anger that she had experienced prior to the move. She is angry, and blames her spouse for not retaining or restoring what she had. The sense of loss is dominant, and P feels that she has gained nothing with the move. Though she has desperately tried to communicate the impact of her loss to her spouse (significant other), she finds him oblivious to her feelings and she accepts the loss as final.

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P experiences her loss as extremely painful and evades confronting this reality. She withdraws both in her behaviour and in her attitude from reminders of the loss. Apart from the death of her son, nothing has been as devastating to her, and she resists exploring the deeper emotional aspects of the loss. P acknowledges that the loss of a significant other is the most intense and devastating experience of loss she has ever had. Despite the feelings of anger she feels towards the significant other, P feels threatened by loss and makes an effort to restore their relationship. She does not want to lose the significant other, and encourages him to come closer to her. P seeks to retain their relationship, and conceals her true feelings (by putting on a façade). P defends herself against isolation.

General Situated Structure of Letting Go

Prior to any reflective thought of letting go, there is contentment with the predominant horizon and the familiar routine of the domestic world that provides comfort and security, along with a sense of continuity through the years.

In the at-homeness and at-oneness of the familiar environment, noise from outside becomes intrusive. Over a period of time, the increasing intensity and overpowering unpredictability of the invasive sounds becomes absolutely intolerable. The self feels trapped and unable to leave the present situation. Despite efforts to exclude the intrusion, this is not possible, thus compounding feelings of helplessness, frustration and destructive anger. In addition to the loss of agency experienced, the intrusion is unbearable, and, with its increasing intensity and persistence, disturbs the stability and comfort of the self. The ability to scream provides the only relief in the entrapment. With the threat to personal stability and self, support from the significant other is needed.

Awareness of the inability to change the invidious situation prompts a decision to leave. Ideal criteria are determined by what best suits the self. Although a new home is found and viewed as a potential solution, the move does not materialise. There is an acknowledgement that, in meeting the criteria and considering the move, the needs of the significant others were not recognised. With sadness, the possibility does not become a reality.

Letting go for personal reasons is resisted as being self-centred and is defended against. Subsequently, in considering the move, the needs of the significant other/s are recognised, and it is accepted that the existing home is also not suitable for them. Support from the significant other (spouse) is necessary before there can be a firm commitment to the decision.

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Within the negative context there is a sense of entrapment, with accompanying feelings of helplessness, frustration and destructive anger. Awareness of a threat to personal stability, together with the fear of fragmentation and disintegration, provide adequate justification to leave. However, at the thought of letting go, feelings of anger and resentment emerge, stemming from the fact that because of the unbearable intrusion, the familiar world has to left behind. There is a resistance to leaving the familiar world.

In letting go, the decision to move, rather than the move itself is considered to be of greater significance. The commitment to making the decision to leave amounts to the move itself and is the pivotal point in letting go. Letting go is synonymous with the decision. However, once the decision is made, ambivalence and conflict arise. With the desire to move, there is also a need to stay.

Arriving at the final decision to let go is agonising, as thoughts about leaving are repetitive. The decision process incites vacillating thoughts, as the self repeatedly moves backwards and forwards before making a commitment. Commitment to the decision is gradual, but, in the process of arriving at the decision, there is recognition of the shared nature of the experience with the significant other (spouse). The experience seems to be mirrored. The vacillation connected with the personal lived experience depends on the degree of intrusion. The experience of entrapment or relief varies according to the presence or absence of the intrusion and is experienced somatically.

In letting go, there is a desire to seek an ideal that meets certain criteria considered important to the self. However, the awareness of finding the ideal in a different environment gives rise to feelings of ambivalence. With the reality of having to let go, the self seeks to retain continuity within the values associated with the criteria pursued. Feelings of anxiety arise regarding the possibility of finding such continuity in the absence of the significant other (spouse), who does not share the same values.

Nevertheless, the desire for continuity is significant, and efforts are made to retain what is meaningful. With the realisation that the move is inevitable, long-term commitments to the familiar environment are evaded, although, throughout the transition process, there

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are still efforts to maintain a continued attachment to what is meaningful. There is continued pursuit of activities enjoyed in the familiar environment, and the intention is to remain attached to the objects that have been significant to the self. A plan is made to retain an attachment to the significant objects during the process of transition.

In the desire for continuity and defence against loss, the self seeks to maintain the familiar psychological order. Feelings of ambivalence arise, for, while the move is considered positive, there is anger and resentment associated with having to let go of the familiar environment that affords continuity for the self and significant others (family). Feelings of sadness arise regarding the loss of what was meaningful in the known environment.

The newness of the unfamiliar environment requires spatial and temporal orientation, as well as including interpersonal aspects where differences and similarities are identified. Ambiguous feelings emerge, because, although there is a sense of not belonging and being foreign in relation to the others, a sense of oneness is also present. Favourable and unfavourable evaluations are made. The parameters of interpersonal space appear different in the new environment.

The process of letting go is uniquely personal as a lived experience. Space is significant to the process of letting go, particularly regarding the need to define personal space. Personal space (auditory and physical) is significant, but not to be attained at the threat of isolation. Feelings of anxiety surface in this regard, and the self defends against being self-centred in the decisions made.

Defining personal space requires projecting personal meaning into the new space and clearing it of what is foreign to the self. The lingering negative foreign residues are resented. There is a desire for a meaningful sense of oneness to be enjoyed in the new environment. Personalising the new world is a gradual and lengthy process, as what is foreign is selectively removed, while what is familiar is held on to. There is a quest to create personal meaning in the new context.

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A number of ideal criteria are met in the new environment but, despite efforts to retain what has been hoped for and gained in the process, the loss of a valued relationship to the natural environment in a form of a beautiful view is experienced soon after arrival. The loss revives the earlier struggle, and returns the self to the feelings of helplessness, frustration and violent anger that were evident prior to the move. Subsequently, there is a sense of having gained nothing by the move. Feelings of aloneness arise, where the significant other (spouse) is perceived as being oblivious to the feelings of the self.

While the loss is extremely painful, efforts are made to evade confronting its reality. Loss of what is valued elicits memories of the devastating loss of a significant other (son) endured in the past, and the destructiveness of interpersonal loss is acknowledged. Despite the feelings of anger in relation to the spouse, efforts are made to restore their existing relationship. In the process, the truth remains hidden, protected by a façade that conceals. There is a defence against loss and isolation.

TABLE III

Participant D : John (J)

Situated Narrative Description of Letting Go

J describes two letting-go situations, letting go of his first business, which was easy, and letting go of the emotional relationship with his ex-fiancée, which has been a lengthy and difficult process. While both situations are considered, the premarital relationship is the dominant situation described.

The Two Situations

J recalls and compares *two* different situated experiences of letting go, where the decision preceding the break determined the nature of letting go. While letting go of the business is easy, letting go of the premarital relationship with his ex-fiancée continues to be difficult. Both experiences occur over the same period in his life (ten years ago), and, although he continues to hold on to what he values in the relationship, he allows the relationship to recede in memory. At the time, in his view of the future, J sees himself in another business, but also sees himself as being married with children in a happy family. Though there is a constructive continuity from the business, providing him with knowledge and experience that he retains and applies later, this is not the case regarding the relationship.

The Business

For J, letting go of his first business is easy as he convinced of his decision to leave. The negative aspects of the business far exceed what is positive, and the anger he feels facilitates him leaving. He has not held on to the business and is convinced of his decision.

The pain of leaving the business is not intense and the recovery from it is speedy. The stability and calm that follows soon brings relief. He is able to think clearly and is willing to move and continue with his life. Leaving the business is liberating and simple, with no difficult process involved. J is happy in his present business.

The Pre-marital Relationship

J is in a premarital relationship, engaged to be married. The engagement is lengthy, and he finds that he cannot remain stuck in a situation that is moving nowhere. He needs to know where he is going. J considers leaving the relationship, but doubts his decision and experiences pain and conflict in the process. He is rationally assured about leaving, but emotionally unhappy to do so, as the unpleasant aspects only slightly exceed what is pleasant, and there is only a small gap between the two.

He feels emotionally vulnerable. Realising that the break is going to be painful, he seeks to protect himself against the pain. Nevertheless, J is irritated with the uncertainty, and, in the hope that the decision will help him find conviction and stability, he decides to be impulsive and make the break. However, once he has made the break, the conviction that he had hoped to find is absent, and he continues to doubt his decision. Despite the uncertainty, though, time and circumstance coerce him finally to let go. With the decision to make the break, J experiences a painful desire to resume the relationship. Rather than relieving the existing doubt and uncertainty as he had hoped, the decision to make the break creates further uncertainty and greater instability.

With the imbalance occasioned by doubting, J suddenly returns to his initial holding-on position, and holds on to the pleasant aspects of the earlier relationship. In holding on, J attempts to protect himself against the turmoil and pain of the break. Holding on is sustaining, but deters progress and impedes healing. His continued attachment gives rise to inner turmoil and emotional instability.

With the decision to leave the relationship, conflict emerges, where turbulent thoughts bring on an emotional crisis. The struggle is destabilising and painful and occurs along with rational attempts to find resolution. There is conflict between J's thoughts and his feelings. Due to the uncertainty, the oscillating process is repeated, while the pain and conflict continue as the period of instability and turmoil is extended. In the storm of the repetitive emotional turmoil, a continuous struggle for stability and survival emerges along with an urgent need to find resolution.

In an attempt to find a solution, J hastily marries and hastily has a child. He believes that he has let go of the relationship, but deceives himself in the process. He is pleased that the negative frustrations are no longer present, and justifies the change by holding on to what is positive about the new situation.

J's commitment to a doubtful decision provokes uncertainties in the present, which lead him to return (ten years later) to the earlier events that had led to that initial decision. Reflectively, he returns to the past, to question and re-evaluate the initial decision that he had taken in haste, but, before he can finally let go, J has to return again to reaffirm his initial decision as correct. J still has to complete the process of letting go, which he finds difficult.

Upon returning to the past, J finds that he has to relive the painful, unpleasant experiences that had receded from his awareness in the present. He returns to the deeper, diffuse levels of his memory, and relives the pain and distress of the premarital relationship. Familiar with the pain encountered, J becomes aware that he had initially sought to avoid the impact of the confusion, and realises that he had hastened the process to protect himself and come through unscathed. J realises that he had *walked* through rather than *worked* through the pain. He becomes aware that he now has to face the challenging confusion and must adopt a different approach. Finding nothing pleasant upon his return, J believes that he is finally committed and serious about confronting the matter.

Leaving the premarital relationship impulsively was an attempt, for J, to find a hasty solution. Rather than attending to the problem itself, J had examined only its surface aspects, and had superficially moved on by hastily getting married and having a child. Subsequently, however, environmental and contextual circumstances provoke the underlying turmoil, and J realises that he had misinterpreted his recovery. He becomes aware that he is not able to deal with the present challenges of his role as husband and father. In the relationship with the significant other (wife) J becomes aware that he has changed. He reflects on their relationship and realises that his reactions to minor incidents

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are exaggerated and aggressive. While his emotional self continues to hold on to the earlier relationship, the continued attachment to the premarital relationship impedes the present marital relationship. J realises that his attachment to the past continues and that he is not committed to the present. This was evident even in the significant life-decision of his marriage. He becomes aware of his unusual behaviour and realises that this is not the way he knows himself.

J realises that the knowledge gained from the premarital relationship was not applied to the present marital relationship. Such continuity is absent, for, although he thought that he had gained from the relationship, in the turbulence and instability that followed the break, he was unable to apply his knowledge constructively. In the reality of his interpersonal world, the conflict of the earlier relationship has ended, but continues to be experienced as a lived struggle. J has found it difficult to extricate himself completely, but nevertheless does believe that aspects retained from the earlier relationship have influenced his choice of marital partner.

After the break, J attempts to discard all memories of the relationship, but holds on to the powerful pleasant memories that continue to sustain him. At first, the pleasant memories that are easy to recall outnumber the unpleasant memories that have receded, and which are concealed from awareness. The meaningful memories that could easily be recalled soon after the break are now (ten years later) only vaguely present. The emotional instability has also receded in memory as J continues with his life. The concealed memories are misinterpreted as proof of healing, and J proudly believes that he has recovered. It is only in retrospect that he realises that he has deceived himself. The memories were present, but not available for immediate recall, and remained hidden from awareness.

J misinterprets his residual memory as meaning that he has let go. The deception is confusing. J assumes that just as he has let go of the business and moved on with his life, so, too, he can let go of the premarital relationship. He considers the visible absence of the relationship as being akin to the finality of death, and assumes that the process of letting go will evolve “naturally” over time.

With effort and perseverance, J convincingly portrays to the world a façade that the past is behind him. He pretends that he has let go and moved on, but, despite his appearance of living, he does not feel alive. He continues to hold on tightly to the former relationship. By holding on he feels protected against the emotional instability and turmoil. In a further attempt to protect himself, J increases his activities and keeps busy by working and drinking. He avoids confronting the issues which threaten him. Ironically, despite his efforts to let go and move on, J continues to hold on to the earlier relationship.

Retrospectively with time, J realises that he has deceived himself and admits that he is faced with a problem. He acknowledges that he has perceived his world in a manner that suited him, for the positions of his truth (holding on) and reality (letting go) do not concur. He finds it painful to integrate who he is and find contentment. J experiences a divided sense of self, and has to resume his holding-on position and face the truth. Once he has achieved this, he realises that he can gradually release the hold he has on the previous relationship. He can create space and finally move on.

For J, the gap or area of vacillation is relevant to letting go. The vacillation and mobility between what was experienced as positive and negative create the gap. He discovers that the more excessive the negative aspects, the easier it is to leave. However, where the gap between the unpleasant and pleasant aspects is marginal and the imbalance slightly negative, then there is doubt and difficulty in the decision to leave. To commit himself to his decision, and make up his mind about leaving, J needs an absolute. His efforts to create a positive balance are not successful, and he accepts the slightly negative gap as sufficient reason to leave.

J continues with the lived struggle and in his attempts to resolve the emotional crisis, pain and aspects related to the break. He reflects and realises that he has deceived himself regarding his recovery. J realises that had he resolved the emotional challenge sooner, then he would have gained from the experience and could have prevented the negative effects which have become part of his present daily reality. Had he not held on to the

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past, then the present would have been different. He realises that by attending to the surface aspects of the problem and naively committing himself to marriage, he has created a new problem. Facing the new conflict brings the reality of his personal choice and will to awareness. He can now decide whether or not to accept the challenge of the conflict with which he is faced. There is the awareness that he can either accept the challenge, or repeat his earlier superficial behaviour. Letting go is recognised as the initial step towards healing, which he acknowledges he was unable achieve at the time.

Living through the struggle and past events of the last ten years, J acknowledges that letting go is a lengthy process. He believes that the process is almost over, and, as he approaches the new world, J finds that the turmoil and threatening disturbances are clearing. The “struggle” appears to be almost over, and he feels a sense of calm and stability approaching. J looks forward to the (future) light and the tranquillity that will soon enter his life.

In the anticipated calm, however, J foresees a problem on the horizon and realises that he is not alone, but attached to significant others (wife and child). He is not free to move on and continue with his life. He is aware that relationships are attachments and that he is not alone. He realises that the more intense the attachments, the more difficult it is for him to let go. Due to his having held on to the past, J realises that he is faced with a new problem. He has to acknowledge the realities of the present, acknowledge his truth, and accept personal responsibility for his decisions. Self-reflection facilitates a greater awareness of the present, with acknowledgement for the new challenge that he accepts and believes he can resolve.

TABLE IV

Participant D: John (J)

General Situated Structure of Letting Go

Letting go of a meaningful relationship with a significant other is difficult and can continue indefinitely. Letting go of a business relationship with no emotional attachments is easy. Although there may be no conscious recall of the significant relationship, emotional holding on does continue. The decision preceding the break determines the nature of letting go.

Conviction of the decision to leave facilitates the process and reduces the pain and healing period. Similarly, where negative values exceed what is positive, then the experience is liberating. The decision to leave is easy, particularly in the presence of angry feelings. The ease of leaving is accompanied by a sense of stability and calm, and is followed by a sense of relief. Commitment to a convincing decision provides clarity and continuity regarding the present and future.

The unfulfilled reality of an anticipated future and extended period of waiting gives rise to feelings of frustration, as the self seeks to determine how to move forward. The sense of being stuck prompts the self to seek direction. Although letting go is considered, there is no conviction and the decision is doubted. There is pain and conflict. An excess of negative values facilitates the move with conviction, but where rational certainty about leaving does not concur with emotions regarding the step, feelings of unhappiness arise at the thought of letting go. Despite the uncertainty, time and circumstance precipitate the movement forwards, as normative social structures are hastily adopted and conformed to. Emotional reluctance impedes the rational consideration to leave and conflict arises. Feelings of vulnerability are also present, and attempts are made to protect the self against the envisaged pain of the break. The slight dominance of what is negative in the relationship gives uncertainty to the decision, but feelings of anger and frustration

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promote the break that is sudden. An impulsive decision is made in the hope of finding conviction and stability.

Nevertheless, once there is a commitment to the decision to leave, there is a painful desire to resume the relationship. The break elicits further doubt and a greater sense of instability, rather than relieving the existing doubt and uncertainty associated with the decision. Positive feelings relating to the changed situation are part of an attempt to justify what has happened, and there is a sense of contentment that the negative frustrations present in the relationship are no longer there. However, as the unpleasant aspects of the relationship only slightly exceeded what was pleasant, there is continued uncertainty regarding the commitment made.

Turbulent thoughts give rise to an emotional crisis. With the decision to leave the relationship, rational and emotional aspects of self are polarised with conflicting thoughts and feelings. The ensuing struggle is destabilising and painful, with rational attempts to find resolution and gain control. Due to uncertainty, the oscillating process is repeated and, with the pain and conflict, there is instability and turmoil. As the struggle is repetitive, so the desire for stability continues. In the emerging chaos, there is an urgent need to find resolution.

Due to the doubtful decision, the earlier relationship continues to be held on to, providing comfort and sustenance, but also deterring progress and impeding healing. However, with the extended period of holding, the emotional turmoil and instability continue. The experience is stormy and tempestuous, with an urgent need for its resolution. Throughout the turmoil of repetitive thoughts and oscillating emotions, the struggle for stability and survival continues.

In the process of experiencing the turmoil and the pain, holding on is protective. Holding on to what is positive and valued in the relationship is desperate and provides a sense of stability that continues to be grasped. In the desire to end the turmoil, the decision to leave is committed to in the hope that the commitment will end the oscillating doubt, ensure conviction and provide stability. This does not occur, however, as the oscillations

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of doubt and the emotional turmoil continue. The experience is rotational, with the self returning to the initial position of holding on. The process repeats itself and extends the experienced instability.

The doubtful past decision elicits uncertainties in the present and the self returns, after many years, to the earlier events that had led to the initial decision. Reflectively, the past is returned to, questioned and re-evaluated, with attempts to understand the reasons for the initial decision, in the hope of finding conviction regarding the correctness of the earlier conclusion. This conviction, even after many years, is necessary for the resolution of the process, and, until this can be successfully accomplished, the oscillating process is repetitive and difficult. Letting go entails struggle and conflict.

By returning to the past, the painful unpleasant experiences that had receded from present awareness have to be relived. The self returns to the deeper, diffuse levels of memory and re-encounters the distress of the earlier relationship. The experience is painful, but familiar. Its familiarity brings about an awareness of having initially evaded the pain, and having avoided actively confronting the impact of the confusion. The self is willing to find resolution and face the challenging doubts, and a serious attitude of commitment is acknowledged in confronting the matter. The unpleasantness encountered in the process of returning to the past in an active manner, is reassuring, as the self believes that it is finally in the process of finding resolution. The initial attempt at finding a solution to the confusion was conducted in a rushed manner, without true intent. Protecting the self from the threat of danger and coming through unscathed was of primary concern. The decision is made to adopt a different approach and attain resolution.

There is acknowledgement that the initial impulsive decision to leave was an attempt to find a hasty solution. In this manner, the surface aspects of the problem, rather than the problem itself, had been attended to. The progress had been superficial, as normative social structures were conformed to. Subsequently, however, environmental and contextual circumstances provoke the contained and concealed turmoil of the past. With the false sense of competence, recovery had been misinterpreted. In recognition of what had happened, a greater awareness of the present unfolds. There is also

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acknowledgement of the presence of fresh challenges that confront the self regarding the new demanding roles associated with the new context regarding the self.

Awareness of a changed self arises in the relationship with the significant other, along with recognition of the exaggerated and aggressive behaviour that has been present. The self acknowledges the emotional attachment to the earlier relationship, where its residues impede the existing significant relationship. With the continued attachment to the past, commitment to the present has been absent, even in the significant life-decision of marriage. There is acknowledgment of an estrangement from the self, where a continuity of being the self is threatened.

Although there is belief in a sense of continuity, this belief is false for the turbulence and instability that follow the break mean that a constructive retrieval and application of the knowledge and experience gained is impeded. While the visible reality of the earlier relationship has ended, experiencing it as a lived struggle continues, as there is difficulty in completely extricating the self. Nevertheless, certain aspects from the earlier relationship have lingered and influenced the choices made regarding the present relationship.

While attempts are made to discard all memories following the break, powerful pleasant memories continue to be held on to. Initially, the pleasant memories remain in conscious awareness and outnumber the unpleasant thoughts of the experience. The unpleasant thoughts recede, and although contained, are hidden from awareness. Years later, with time, all memories, including the emotional instability that was experienced, have receded in memory and are only vaguely present. The absence of the memories is interpreted as meaning that the self has healed, and as the process of daily living continues, and, the self with pride, believes in its recovery. The recovery is false, however, as the concealed memories are misinterpreted. The self proudly believes in having achieved resolution, but the belief is deceptive. Only in retrospect does the deception of the self become a reality. The self realises that, despite the absence of the relationship, the memories were present, although contained and hidden from awareness.

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Successful resolution of an earlier experience of letting go promotes the false belief of recovery. The self believes in what it wants to believe, and deception confuses the matter. The visible absence of the earlier relationship is viewed as being akin to the finality of death. It is falsely assumed that the reality of the relationship would not be retained. There is acceptance of the belief that the process of letting go evolves naturally over time.

Through effort and perseverance, the façade is maintained in the form of a convincing portrayal to the world that the past no longer exists. There is the pretence of having let go and having moved on. Although there is the appearance of being alive, this lacks authenticity, as the genuine feeling is absent. The relationship continues to be held on to, as it provides protection against the threat of instability and turmoil. In an attempt to evade the surfacing of the concealed memories and to protect himself against confronting the threatening issues, there are conscious efforts to keep busy, either through working or drinking. Ironically, despite efforts to let go and move on, holding on to unresolved aspects of the earlier relationship continues.

Retrospectively with time, awareness of the self-deception increases, along with acknowledgment of being faced with a problem. There is a realisation that the world is perceived in a manner that is suitable to personal reality. The self believes in what it seeks to believe. Awareness of the deception brings to the fore the polarised presence of personal truth and personal reality. The positions of truth and reality do not concur, and a divided sense of self becomes evident. Self-integration is difficult, particularly regarding a reconciliation of the past with the present and finding harmony and contentment in the process. The holding-on position has to be resumed, while the truth has to be confronted. Confronting truth and reality is an achievement, and allows for the hold gradually to be released. Space is created in the process and mobility assured.

The space between what is positive and what is negative creates a gap that is relevant to letting go. Mobility within the gap is an attempt to find meaning. Positive and negative values are weighed against each other. Dominance of the negative values makes it easier to let go, while a marginal difference creates doubt and difficulty regarding the decision

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to leave. In making a committed decision, the absolute is pursued in the desire for stability. Despite efforts to create a positive balance, the slightly negative inclination is considered sufficient reason to leave.

The lived struggle persists in the present, with continued attempts to find resolution. Upon reflection, the deception becomes a reality, with the realisation that resolution of the emotional challenge can prevent negativity in the present. How the past is dealt with influences present reality. By attending to the surface aspects of the problem a solution is not found, and instead a new problem is created. Facing the new conflict brings to awareness the meaning of personal choice – either confronting the challenge of the existing conflict, or repeating the earlier superficial behaviour. The self has to be actively involved in finding an effective resolution. Letting go is the initial step towards healing and not always easy. Letting go is a struggle that extends over time and can continue indefinitely. However, as the turmoil clears, there is awareness that the struggle is almost over. Perception of the future, with its promise of light and tranquillity, creates optimism.

However, in the anticipated calm and stability, a problem on the horizon is foreseen and the self becomes aware of not being alone. The attachment to significant others is recognised as impeding independent mobility. The greater the attachments made, the greater the difficulty in letting go. The significance of interpersonal relationships is acknowledged together with an awareness of the inevitable holding on that is part of the process, and the implications of holding on to the past. A greater awareness of the present with its challenges emerges. With a renewed sense of trust in the self, the challenge is accepted.

Situated Narrative Description of Letting Go

The situation of letting go for K arises in the parent-child relationship with her adolescent son (and daughter). K is married with a family and enjoys being the parent of her two (adolescent) children. Letting go is absent from her thematic field, and she assumes that the family integrity, oneness and feeling of belonging that she enjoys will continue.

In the midst of the familiar order she knows and enjoys, a new dialectic emerges as K becomes aware of change. She realises that her son is in the process of creating a distance between them. His comments are hurtful and because of their previous closeness, she feels totally rejected. The initial letting-go process began during her son's early adolescence. It is painful for her as she often feels sad and cries with feelings of *rejection* and disapproval. Although the closeness with her son does resume, she continues to feel his disapproval. She realises that their relationship is changing as he is growing up and in the process of separating from her. K realises that she is no longer the significant other in his life.

Rationally, K understands that she has to grant her adolescents space, but nevertheless finds letting go very stressful, as conflicting thoughts and feelings arise where she is also afraid of loss. For K, letting go is a gradual experience of *loss*, which appears as separation during the adolescent years and is difficult for her. K fears the absolute loss of her adolescents through death which would ultimately devastate her. The loss of significant others in her life has influenced her, as she needs to hold on tightly to her relationships and retain what she has. K desires to maintain the continuity of the oneness shared with her family and the significant others, but feels an impending threat of interpersonal loss and deprivation. Letting go means having to lose the meaningful sense of oneness she enjoys. With her adolescents growing up, she senses losing the oneness shared.

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In an effort to accept the change in her son's behaviour, K seeks rationally to *understand* the behavioural *norm* of adolescence, and is receptive to the opinion of respected young adults. A trusted professional opinion that her son's behaviour is normal makes it easier for her to accept. K finds further solace in the fact that she is not alone regarding the tension of parenting adolescents. She recognises and identifies with other mothers in the same plight. K rationally believes that she has to let go, and that she must conceal her feelings. Holding on to the familiar (norm) and gaining knowledge of adolescence facilitates the process of letting go for her.

In the relationship with her adolescent son, K evades acknowledging her emotions (pain, anger, aloneness). She accepts that she has to grant him space and freedom to explore new horizons, and that she *must not reveal her true feelings*. Besides feeling rejected by him, she is anxious about his safety, but evades acknowledging this, yet finds it difficult, painful and unpleasant having to contain and conceal her true feelings. K believes that the presence of a façade is necessary to the process of letting go. Being aware that she is no longer the significant other in her son's life is painful, and she realises that she can no longer rely on him as she used to. K had assumed that the close relationship with her son would always be there, but she becomes aware of a distance between them. Others verify the distance. K decides to conceal the truth and resists being self-centred, while she considers the perspectives of her adolescent children above her own.

There is awareness of an evolving *separateness*, as the originally close-knit family unit is changing. Due to the individuating activities of the adolescents, the joint family holiday is altering. For the first time, K and her husband are separated from their (adolescent) children when they leave on holiday without them. Though the (adolescent) children seemed to accept the separateness, K feels that she is abandoning them and being selfish. The ease with which the significant other accepts the separation facilitates her acceptance of the value of space and separateness.

K experiences conflict and ambiguity. Although she feels that the extended *environment* is a threat to her son, she rationally believes that she has to allow him to enter it and explore new horizons. Despite evidence of her son's competence and legal permission to deal with environmental demands, she continues to view the environment as threatening,

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as potential negligence and destructive aspects could harm him. K believes that her son is possibly only safe in certain areas of the extended environment. She feels protective of him and fears that he may come to harm. K wants him to be safe. There is ambiguity, for, although she trusts her son (and daughter), she mistrusts the changing environment.

Consenting to his holiday with peers is a major step for K, who, despite the knowledge she has regarding his trip, is anxious about his safety, particularly as he is still entering the unknown. Ironically, although K respects her son as a young adult, she feels *anxious* about his present lack of experience and wisdom in life. She believes him to be naïve and imagines what he could do. She does not want him to repeat the carelessness of her adolescent behaviour, which could have dire consequences.

In viewing the past, K reflects on the *memories* of her own adolescence, and her quest for autonomy, despite the attachment to her family of origin. She recalls the joy of separateness, the vacillating behaviour, and the difficult return to her family. In recalling the past, K attempts to gain a view and an understanding of the future. She anticipates a repeat of the situation and recognises the imminent long-term and distant separation (overseas) from her son (and daughter) who now seek/s to move away. Though K accepts that her adolescents are close to her, she fears that they may not return.

In her view of the future, K becomes aware of the *ageing* process as a personal reality, and realises that she will follow the same path as her parents. A new dialectic emerges. Within the context of ageing, K becomes aware of the threat of aloneness, emptiness and fear of *abandonment* with which, due to her paramedical experience, she is familiar. She is aware of elderly people, who either have no significant other, or who are alone with no meaningful relationship. Abandonment is a threatening reality. The process of letting go is painful for K, who experiences a sense of loss, along with feelings of rejection, emptiness and fears of abandonment and aloneness.

There is ambivalence and conflict, for, although K rationally wants her adolescents to fulfil their desires and create their own space, she fears that they may not return. In the process of letting go of her son, and the increasing space between them, K also becomes

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aware of the gradually increasing distance between her and her younger adolescent daughter who is also growing up and moving away. With the experience she now has, K attempts to prevent a repeat of the pain and negativity endured, and she decides to equip herself rationally with knowledge and understanding of adolescence and the process of letting go.

In her attempt to avoid facing the *aleness* she fears, K keeps busy, but in the emerging silence of her passivity, she is suddenly faced with the unfolding reality of her future. K becomes aware of a changed meaning regarding the family. She is confronted with an impending aleness and social seclusion - a world and reality in which her father presently lives. K views her distant future as empty.

As K faces the future, she is reluctant to accept the passing of *time*. She treasures the past and holds on tightly to the earlier developmental phases shared with her son, seeking to capture what she had. Her tight hold on the past makes it difficult for her to deal with the present, like accepting that she is no longer the significant other in her son's life. The unresolved obstacles recognised in the present impede her mobility into the future. Her vision of the future and its positive aspects are obscured, for, in the process, she is more aware of what is negative (threat, pain, sadness) making letting go (in the present) difficult. Despite the initial negativity (turmoil and heartache) experienced, K becomes aware of positive aspects (diversity and excitement) to be enjoyed in the process.

As K looks to the future with visions of what her life will be like in the absence of her adolescents, she continues to live the process of letting go, and seeks to find positive aspects in the future that will facilitate the move. K's situated experience continues and is still to be resolved.

General Situated Structure of Letting Go

In the familiar and secure family environment, letting go is initially absent from the thematic field as family integrity, oneness and the feeling of belonging are enjoyed. In the midst of the known order, a new dialectic emerges, as change enters the familiar world. Suddenly, new space enters the picture, where, despite the initial closeness enjoyed in the past, the parent becomes aware of a defined distance in the relationship with the adolescent. Others verify the reality of the increasing distance.

The initial letting go during early adolescence is painful, with feelings of rejection and disapproval. Although the closeness is resumed at a later stage in the relationship, the parent continues to feel disapproval which accompanies an increasing awareness of their changing relationship. With growth, there is separation, and the awareness of no longer being the significant other to the adolescent.

There is rational understanding that space has to be granted to the adolescent, yet letting go is very stressful. Conflicting thoughts and feelings arise and there is a fear of loss. Letting go is a gradual experience of separation and loss, which, for the parent during the adolescent years, is difficult. There is fear of absolute loss through death, which would ultimately prove to be devastating. Previous loss of significant others prompts the self to hold on tightly to the valued relationships of the present. There is a desire to continue the meaningful sense of oneness shared with family and significant others, but interpersonal loss is an impending threat. Letting go is viewed as losing the meaningful sense of oneness enjoyed. Growth and development of the adolescent is the loss of closeness for the parent.

Rational understanding of the process is an attempt to accept the change. A developmental and behavioural norm facilitates acceptance of the process. Holding on to

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the familiar (norm) and gaining knowledge of adolescence facilitates the process of letting go. Furthermore, knowledge, too, that the parent is not alone in the experience is helpful, as there is an identification with other parents in similar situations.

There is an acceptance of granting the adolescent space and freedom to explore new horizons, acknowledging that, while space is being granted, feelings should be contained and concealed in an understanding that their truth must remain hidden. Containing and concealing the emotional truth regarding feelings of rejection or anxiety pertaining to the adolescent's safety is painful and unpleasant. A façade is accepted as a necessary part of the process. In concealing the truth, however, there is a resistance to being self-centred, while the perspective of the adolescent is considered as being primary to the will of the self. Accepting the increasing distance is a painful loss, recognising that the relationship had been taken for granted, with the assumption that it would always be there and not change. Relationships, in their immediacy, are deceptively assumed as being permanent.

The evolving separateness is acknowledged, as the original close-knit family unit is changing. Due to the individuating activities of the adolescent/s, joint family holidays change. While the adolescents accept the separateness, the parent feels a sense of guilt in the attachment not being retained. The self continues to defend against being self-centred. Identification with the significant other facilitates the process of allowing space and accepting separateness in the process of letting go.

The parent experiences conflict and ambiguity, for, although there is the feeling that the extended environment is a threat to the adolescent, there is also a rational belief that permission has to be granted for him to explore new horizons. The expanding world for the adolescent is unknown to the parent. Despite evidence of the adolescent's competence which is legally reinforced, the environment is viewed as threatening, as the adolescent may come to harm. Ambivalence continues, as the parent believes that the adolescent is possibly only safe in certain areas of the extended environment. There is a desire to protect the adolescent against harm. Ironically, although the adolescent is trusted, there is

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a mistrust of the changing environment. The parent respects the adolescent as a young adult, but feels anxious regarding the adolescent's lack of wisdom and life experience.

From the perspective of personal history, the parent understands the carelessness of adolescent behaviour, and feelings of anxiety arise in this regard. The parent reviews experiences and memories as she returns to personal adolescent history, with its quest for autonomy through a process of separating from the family of origin. The joy of separateness, the vacillating behaviour, and the difficult return to the family of origin are recalled. In remembering the past, attempts are made to gain an insight into the future. While the adolescent seeks to move away, the parent anticipates the imminent long-term parting involved in the separation process. There is acknowledgement of their present closeness, but as far as the adolescents' explorations of the horizons beyond are concerned, there is anxiety regarding the possibility of being left alone.

The parent's projective view of the future includes awareness of the *ageing* process, where, with its aloneness and emptiness, there is fear of *abandonment* which is a threatening reality. The process of letting go is painful for the parent, who experiences feelings of loss, rejection and emptiness, as well as fears of abandonment and aloneness. Feelings of ambivalence and conflict arise, for, although the parent rationally accepts that the adolescent must be granted space, the emotions experienced in this regard are contradictory. There is anxiety and a need to be protective. While the parent adapts to the increasing space, there is a gradual awareness of the increasing distance between the parent and the younger adolescent who is also growing up and moving away. With attempts to prepare for, and prevent, a repeat of the pain and negativity endured with the initial separation, a decision is made to empower the self with knowledge and understanding of the nature of adolescence and the process of letting go.

In an attempt to avoid facing the aloneness that threatens, the parent attempts to keep busy, but, in the emerging silence of passivity, the parent is suddenly faced with the unfolding reality of the imminent future and changed meaning regarding family. The parent is confronted with the impending aloneness and social seclusion of old age, an inevitable reality that eventually affects every generation.

As a result, there is a reluctance to accept the passing of time. While the past is treasured and tightly held on to, earlier developmental phases are reviewed in a desire to capture what was then present. However, a tight hold on the past makes it difficult to meet with challenges in the present, and creates difficulties regarding mobility into the future. Vision of the positive aspects regarding the future is obscured, for in the process, there is greater awareness of future negativity which does not make letting go easy. While negative values threaten, positive values of the experience can be enjoyed.

The parent looks to the future, with visions of what to expect in the space and emptiness without the meaningful presence of the adolescents who are in the process of leaving. While the process of letting go continues, a positive focus is pursued that will facilitate mobility into the future. The process of letting go continues until resolution is accomplished.

5.4 General Psychological Structure of Letting Go

Different moments emerge with each individual experience of letting go. Sequences vary and depend on idiosyncratic incidents, as certain constituent moments may be repeated, yet differ in duration and intensity. Due to its essential temporality, the experience cannot be contained in stasis, nor can a linear or sequential construct apply to it. The process is one of continuous mobility, of an emerging spiral relative to its contextual environment.

From the individual letting-go experiences explored, the psychological insights achieved invariably revealed the truth of the experience and established its general psychological structure. To illustrate the psychological constituents presented, examples from the original naïve descriptions (edited to the first person, where necessary) have been included to support the general themes discussed.

Findings

1. Letting go is a transitional process that gradually extends over time.

Letting go revealed itself as a transitional process of leaving a familiar world and entering the unknown. Change is inevitable to the process. In the present study, not all participants had completed the journey regarding their lived experience of letting go. Participant M had moved through the experience, come through to the other side, and had found resolution. Participants B and P had been through the struggle and had just arrived in their new environment, making attempts to seek a sense of familiarity and at-homeness. Having endured the struggle, participant J was approaching the end of the process and was becoming increasingly aware of the clarity, calm and stability that lay ahead. He was looking forward to the relief soon to be attained, but, with a new appreciation for the present, J becomes aware of the fresh challenges and obligations that face him. Participant K was still in the early stages of her experience.

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Letting go was a process that gradually extended over time. It occurred at intervals, taking place over an indefinite period, confronting the participants with a need to meet with change and move on. Encountering the ubiquitous temporal demand for mobility was difficult, as the invitation to change was initially met with resistance. The process extended over an indefinite period, as the mobility of life was made thematic. Where the challenge of change was evaded, repeated opportunities would arise, renewing the challenge to resolve the process and move on. The process was not immediate and took time, occurring at varying intervals with intermittent pauses (stages). To suddenly let go was considered to be superficial, as aspects of change would have to be returned to and the process repeated until its complete and final resolution. In achieving mobility, the challenge of change had to be accepted. It was only in retrospect that the nature of the process, with its significant idiosyncratic intervals (stages), was recognized.

- Letting go was a transitional process:

J85: I believe that I am quite close to the point that I can say that I am nearly there. I believe that I have really let go, because letting go is a process. Maybe because it was such a process to get to where I am.

M84: I definitely went through stages. It (letting go) was a process. The process was the stages of pain and anger; active processes that really happened.

- Letting go gradually extended over time:

P27: It (letting go) wasn't a one-day thing. It just went on and on and on for months.

M64/65: (Making the change) did not happen overnight that I went to look for an answer or a new angle. It did take a little while. It wanted to start and then you say "No", tomorrow you will. It was like letting the water go out slowly, instead of everything at one shot. Everything at one shot would take (me) back to the early stages and fool myself again, like the angry outbursts were futile. I realised that it was going to be a slow process getting to where I wanted to be. Applying the new approach was slow because the old approach obviously did not work.

J50: Then you have to go back and say, "Oh this is where I am standing and this is where I am holding on. Let's slowly, slowly try and release the grip that we have on this experience and distance ourselves and then move on."

- The nature and reality of the process was only recognised in retrospect:

M79: I now realise that what I did (that first morning) was really take the darker side and only after three months did I enter the clarity of the lighter side.

J42: Therefore, I perceived the fading as healing and it felt to me like I was getting better. Meanwhile, it was my short-term memory that was failing me...and you “sommer gaan aan” (simply carry on).

2. Letting go entails making decisions.

In letting go, an initial decision would be followed by a later subsequent significant final decision to commit to change. The decision to change related the commitment as being subject to personal will and control rather than to unpredictable factors. The initial decision would initiate the intention to meet with environmental change, whereas the significant and subsequent decision was a definitive commitment to meet with change, enter the future and move on. The initial decision provided knowledge and insight useful to the significant final decision, which determined steps into a specific future and reduced the threat of entering the unknown. In an attempt personally to determine the future and take control, self-reflection, self-questioning and self-dialogue preceded the decision to be made. The process of making the decision included self-confrontation and the awareness of the uniquely personal nature of the experience. The decision was an attempt to project into the future and move with intentionality. Decision-making was a conscious attempt to gain rational control of the process. With the decision, change was adapted to with intentionality, as the impending change was subjected to personal will. Ideas and possibilities regarding the future were considered and determined the eventual commitment made. Arriving at the final decision, however, was painful and took time, as the self would vacillate to and fro, approaching and avoiding change, in an ambiguous manner. Commitment to the significant final decision was the pivotal moment of letting go.

- Decisions were made:

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P20/21: If you want to talk about letting go, then that was the part; getting to the point of 'Yes, I am going to go. Yes. I am leaving this home. I am going to actually sell this place and move'. That was the turning point...The decision was the move, not the physical move.

M4/7 (initial decision): I will never forget the first morning when I woke up in hospital. It was as if I was faced with this decision...I had a choice, I knew I had to make a decision.

M20 (committed decision):... I could feel that the one day I was upset, the other day aggressive towards Larry (spouse) so I realised that I had to look at things from a different angle.

J4: Because (I) was not one hundred per cent sure that it was the right thing to do, letting go became a problem...It boils down again to the decision that I was making.

3. Holding on is dialectical to letting go.

In the process of letting go, there was a powerful need to hold on and retain the familiar significant attachments. Retaining relatedness made it possible for separation to occur. With the threat of impending change and a demand to enter the unknown, holding on maintained the desired continuity and rootedness of remaining attached to the familiar sense of oneness, stability and security known. In letting go, holding on was sustaining and experienced as an essential link to life. While letting go connoted death and non-existence, holding on was synonymous with keeping alive. Meaningful attachments were held on to and included significant others, relationships, inanimate objects, (past) memories, (future) dreams, norms, values and beliefs, whatever would provide stability, security and protection against pain, confusion and the terror of entering the existential vacuum (gap). Participant M's attachment was to the pain of her loss, for its meaningful significance and the vacuum it filled. Holding on to its negativity paradoxically provided a sense of stability. All meaningful and sustaining links were retained in memory for future recall. While holding on was sustaining and provided a sense of stability, persistent holding on was restrictive. Lingering attempts to continue holding on impeded mobility and growth and gave rise to feelings of pain and instability. The greater the intensity of holding on, the greater the reluctance to accept change and allow for the passing of time.

- Holding on is life-sustaining, providing a sense of oneness and stability:

J78: How the hell do I deal with this pain? By grasping on to the good things that I can find because I am desperate and I don't know when to go and when to leave. Now it's the good things I cling to. The knuckles go white because I am holding on so bad and that is what I am not supposed to do...I just hold on for dear life.

K46: By hanging on, I suppose wanting things to still be around. I missed them because there are things that I want to share with them.

M55: The happy things were a 'No, No'. It was (my) right to carry this pain and be miserable. The pain became my baby and I felt guilty if I thought of letting go.

- Persistent holding on impeded mobility and growth:

J12/13: Meanwhile, under the surface, there's a whole lot of unfinished business, which means, no, you have not let go. (Because I did not let go), I could not progress. Holding on was in all respects detrimental.

M33: No, I did not let go of the pain immediately. It was as if nurturing the thoughts of (my) child was actually the pain. It wasn't happy pain, a joyful fulfilling thing...It was with pain and I was angry. I did not want to forget and I thought of my child quite often but I was sad.

4. Letting go includes the experience of spatiality, connoting the fear of loss and entry into the unknown.

Space and distance were inevitable to the process, creating a gap, which, paradoxically, needed to be avoided. Awareness of the gap gave rise to alienating tension and the gnawing threat of isolation. Holding on attempted to bridge the gap of space and separateness that had entered the process. The creation of space threatened the self with loss, isolation and entering the unknown. Holding on was an attempt to retain a link to familiarities and relieve the emerging anxiety. The increasing space, with its unpredictability and nothingness, implied risk and threat to the self. With the increasing threat, there was a profound need to continue holding on. Though a sense of separateness

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was defined, space and distance were accepted with ambiguity. While space connoted a sense of abandonment, space also conveyed a sense of autonomy and freedom.

- Space and distance were inevitable to the process of letting go:

P24: I can't tell you! I can't tell you the joy of having my own space. Not only from the noise but coming home and not having (the intruders) in my driveway all the time.

J50: Let's slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly try and release the grip that we have on this experience and distance ourselves and then move on.

K2/3: I definitely had to realise my distance, how far I could go. After a while (my son) sort of let me back in again, but if we were on to parents' evening, he would say "Please behave" and things like that... That is when I started to realise that he is getting bigger and moving away.

- With its threat of loss and isolation, there was ambivalence accepting the space:

P32: I need the trees; I need the animals. (My husband) is not like that. He is more of a city slicker. I am a city slicker (but) if I had to land up on a farm, I might say, 'Oh no, this is never what I thought of'.

K34: Both Matt and Alice (adolescent children)... both would like to go overseas and I hope they do go overseas. I want them to do that, to spread their wings. But its also that feeling that they might not come back and that is the sort of scariness being alone.

In the process of letting go, the creation of space whether voluntary (participant P) or not, (participant K), implied the experience of loss, either real or anticipated.

- The experience of loss and emptiness was viewed as synonymous with letting go:

P11: My trees! You know I came here and (the trees that I had planted) were big and I lived there (with the trees) for almost thirty years! They were magnificent trees! I have left them. Terrible, terrible, terrible that!

K42/47: Yes, (letting go) is a painful process...that sort of feeling that you are empty being alone, discarded.... Even if you haven't lost your child, his or her moving on is that you lose that sharing and that togetherness.

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- To let go was to enter the unknown space of nothingness: B30: Letting go is not easy. It is like jumping from the plane before the parachute opens.

K27: The first big thing was the matric holidays...I knew where they were going and how they were going but not whether they were going to get there safely and back. Just allowing them (to go) was a big step.

5. Letting go entails a façade, which contains and conceals personal truth.

Maintaining the familiar realm and holding on to what was significant, led to the creation of a façade or false sense of being, whereby participants avoided acknowledging the truth of their feelings. The impression was created of having moved on, but the mobility was merely an appearance. True emotions and thoughts were contained and concealed, protected and prevented from reaching the surface and being exposed. By means of the façade, social attachments were maintained, while thoughts and emotions considered negative to familiar daily life remained hidden, regardless of the pain, discomfort and dis-ease experienced in doing so. Holding on to the security of the known continued, while the visible mobility of life was superficial. Behaviour was robot-like and automatic, devoid of authenticity. However, while others were deceived in the process, the façade would also deceive the self. As life continued, a false sense of competence was assumed. Not revealing the truth helped retain the interpersonal links that were crucial in the process. To avoid acknowledging the truth, activities increased, with conscious efforts to keep very busy. As the truth remained hidden in the everyday world, outer appearances were deceptive regarding the mobility and agency of the self. Consciously avoiding thoughts of negativity facilitated the deception. Only retrospectively, upon completion of the process, does the deception become apparent.

- A façade contained and concealed the truth that remained hidden:

K9: It was dreadful not saying something and not being overprotective but allowing them (adolescents) letting them to experiment and hoping they come out the other side in one piece.

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M35: At some stage I realised that I was going on like a robot. To look as if you are fine, to smile, to work, but it is false. You do what is expected of you but it is raw inside. Deep inside you are shattered.

J23: On the surface there are pretty pictures and everything looks fine. Everything is 'lekker' (nice). Just underneath that, underneath the surface there is actually the bubbling.

- Activity increased in attempting to evade the pain and acknowledging the truth:

M18/19: Either you just let go completely or you try to bottle it up. There was the two extremes. It was about two months. I must admit I tried to keep my social schedule extremely busy.

J22: Practically, on the surface, I was trying to move along. I was trying to let go practically and looking for opportunities, things to do to let these things happen.

K35: I think there are times one can cope because you find activities to do... You are busy, your mind is busy.

J80: You allow other things. You work harder. You drink more. You play, you do whatever you have to do. You shield yourself off from all of these (painful) things to do something else, so that you don't have time to wonder about this stuff which is so threatening.

- The early deceptive belief of personal stability:

M31: I did not have the signals at first that something is wrong because everybody thinks that you are fine. You think that you are fine because you actually carry on. You are fooling yourself and you actually start to believe that.

J46/49: Like I say, maybe the biggest problem with letting go is that it is deceptive. Yes, it deceives you. It presents itself to you as if it (letting go) has happened and that is not true.... You had seen the practical things for what you had hoped they were and then one day you realise that they are not and then you have a problem.

J81: Slowly but surely you get to the deception part where your mind is so desperate for a solution that it starts to tell itself: "Look at me. Just look at me. Am I not the perfect example of someone who is coping?"

6. Memories are significant, providing continuity as the past is re-turned to.

Memories made the past thematic in the present, as aspects of personal his-story were repeated. Weaving the past into the present made entry into the future possible. Before moving forward, attempts were made to retain a sense of continuity as past events and experiences were returned to, in an attempt to hold on to what was meaningful. A diffuse, disordered and unresolved past obscured clarity in the present and impeded mobility into the future. Significant links from the past were retained as memories of the past were carried through to the present. Memories, with their meaning, bridged the gap or existential vacuum and provided a sense of continuity. With the consistent diversity of the change encountered, the retention of past memories and structures provided a sense of permanence, with a reassurance sense of continuity. In thought, memories were significant in retaining access to the past, though there was evidence, too, of a physical return to places significant to personal history. An illustration of this occurred with participant (B), who physically returned to his place of birth and relived the earlier phases of history as he rekindled memories of the people and places that were meaningful to him. The people and places recalled were integral to the memories and experiences retained.

Before committing to the significant subsequent decision, the past had to be returned to, as the original steps taken were retraced and experiences useful to the self were retrieved in a re-attempt to find resolution and facilitate mobility forward. Nevertheless, attaining such resolution was not easy and often met with resistance, to be returned to at a later stage. Doubtful decisions regarding forward mobility lead to a re-turn, re-view and a re-tracing of the earlier process, before entering the future. Returning to the past, however, was not always intentional, as contextual experiences could provoke memories of earlier related experiences. This was evidenced with Participant P, whose experience of loss in the new environment following her move, led to a revival of earlier feelings of frustration and helplessness that had been present prior to the move. Negativities of personal history often impeded relating to the world in the present, and impeded forward mobility. While facing the future in the context of the present, experiences and memories were repeatedly re-viewed and re-interpreted, providing a sense of continuity to fill the

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gap that threatened in the present. While a disordered past obscured clarity in the present, the past could also convey re-assuring memories that provided sustenance for moving on.

Returning to the past meant to repeat and re-live the experience, either for it to be re-affirmed as correct, or to re-evaluate and discover a new positive meaning with which to continue. In order to move forward, the necessary clarity and conviction of a final solution meant that the past had to be repeated, and painfully returned to, lived over and over again until attaining its final re-solution. Painful memories remained hidden, often difficult to recall, but were nevertheless retained for future reference, as recall would provide presence and bridge the gap of absence, retaining the necessary attachment in the demand to move on. As there was a return to past structures, memories of the past gained significance in the present and provided the foundation for continuity into the future. A positive focus on the future facilitated forward mobility.

- Steps were retraced, through a return to the past:

J54: But now you have to go back and say, 'You need to finish this off'. The only way to finish this off is to go back into the jungle and let the defenses down and work through it rather than just trying to get through it as quickly as possible.

J11: The problem is that if you make the decision hastily or emotionally unstable and it wasn't a well thought through structured type of decision, then you have to go back before that. Maybe remind yourself and confirm for yourself ten years down the line that that was the right decision for you.

B11: I recently went back to Darwin where I was born...Literally and figuratively, I went along the roads that I was on as a child because I lived part of my life in Cape Town, Stellenbosch and that area.

- Experiences in the present could revive earlier past experiences:

P41/43: I went mad!! I screamed. I was back in Barclay, frustrated and I can't do anything about it. Back to the Bazooka....I would sit on the bed (in the new home) and look at the lights in the distance. I could not tell you how wonderful it was, and its gone!

- Retention of a sense of continuity remained significant:

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P28: Then I start thinking in terms of why should I put this plant here, I am not going to watch it grow. I am going to move... I started putting little plants into pots to move and then I am getting ready for wherever I am going. I need my plats. I need my trees.

M75: Yes and to let go because we had to name our child. It was a little boy and his name was Luke and I could say “good bye” in the sense that he would always be there. Our future children will know about him.

B12/13/15: I really enjoyed it. It was a positive experience. I still have memories of the places and perhaps in time, I will be able to return again....It was quite meaningful. It was good to see that even my father’s grave is still there. Just to know that although things are changing and we are going on our own ways, there are foundations left. There are a lot of new things, buildings and places but the old ones are still there.... the memories that go with the experiences. You can’t really separate the two.

J32: Many an attribute in Joyce (wife) I think came from the experience with Moira (ex-fiancée)...But even selecting her as a potential partner, some very good qualities are there today. You know that she is a very good mom; she is extremely efficient in what she does. All of those things have something to do with the relationship I had with Moira.

7. The self is challenged to a repetitive and paradoxical struggle.

As the unknown confronted the known, in a push-pull motion, change and mobility were evaded. In spite of the initial attempts to continue along the familiar route and evade the reality of change, the relationship to the self did not remain stagnant. In the existential conflict of the decision, the self was challenged through its confrontation with change, through choice, conflict, turmoil and repetition. Conflicting poles emerged in the desire for sameness and the demand for change.

Repetitive confrontation gave rise to a lived struggle, as the self would swing between positives and negatives, moving to and fro, avoiding the gap yet feeling trapped and immobilised in the process. Issues not resolved in the past were re-turned to, relived, repeated and revised over and over again until they were finally re-solved before moving on. Lapses in time apropos the repetition varied as idiosyncratic differences became evident within and between experiences. Returning to the past was relative to circumstances in the present and a willingness to face the future.

The realm of the false facade and concealed emotions gave rise to conflicting feelings of doubt and uncertainty. With the polarisation of rational and emotional aspects, an ambiguous sense of self emerged with increasing efforts to gain and maintain rational control, as emotions, considered negative to the façade, were contained and prevented from coming to the fore. In the process, the self was challenged to seek and find a solution and make a commitment. The polarity of the conflict regarding change increased, the struggle intensified and a painful and laborious process developed, repeatedly confronting and challenging the self. The self was in crisis, as thoughts would oscillate, behaviour would vacillate, and emotions would swing from one extreme to another, pushing and pulling the self, to and fro, forwards and backwards, approaching and avoiding change. The force intensified, creating a circular, whirling, spinning motion, which ironically immobilized the self. What was happening seemed beyond personal control; the power would surge with increasing intensity, pushing the self to the threshold. Instability and fragmentation threatened the self with annihilation. The existence and integrity of the self were at risk.

- Conflicting thoughts were present, as feelings of doubt and uncertainty emerged:

P27: It wasn't a one-day thing. It would just go on and on for months. You know, and then I would think "Yes, I am going to sell it", and then ...the weekends would come and I would think "Gee, the weekends are brilliant: where am I going to have weekends like this?"

J61: So the bad just outweighs the good enough and you are irritated enough and annoyed enough to make the decision and the moment you have made the decision, your mind goes "Are you sure?"

K37: First of all there is conflict. You know that there is conflict. You know that you have to let go but you don't want to lose.

The presence of the deceptive façade and avoidance of the truth gave rise to feelings of entrapment, which the opposing polarities had created. The persistent turmoil of approaching and avoiding change had created a crisis. The feeling was of being seized in the stifling grip of immobility, caught in an impasse, unable to move forward and

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continue with life. The self had deceived, lured, captured and trapped itself, with nowhere to go, no space to move to. With feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, efforts to change the contextual situation were in vain; the position could not be altered. The earlier entrapment in relation to the world had emerged in relation to the self, and the initial space evaded in relation to the world had emerged in relation to the self. Ironically, the experience was one of a whirlpool of oscillating thoughts and vacillating emotions, but with an omnipotent and overpowering force that impeded mobility.

- A sense of being trapped and immobilised:

M34: I saw that I was running around in circles around the event that never took place. I could not move on; it was part of the fooling game. Whatever I did, I would come back to the event. I could not get back. It was like a tornado sucking you back. It was big and overshadowed everything.

P9/14: (The noise) ruined my life. I went to court to put my case to them and I got nowhere. I was very ill at the time but I got nowhere....Then I thought to myself: 'I am doomed to noise for the rest of my life!'

B1: I felt that I had to do it (let go). I felt stuck. I was comfortable because of the securities such as salary, medical aid and pension fund, but it was not what I really wanted to do.

The increasing diverse polarities of the demand to maintain the pretence, and the intensity of the contained personal feelings, had ultimately created the conditions for truth to ripen burst though the mask of social appearances. However painful, once the truth had ruptured through the facade, there was a need to re-view the past and be honest with the self. Though the change appeared impulsive, it had taken time to materialise.

Awareness of the alienated truth and emerging authenticity reduced the opposing polarities, facilitated integration and made mobility possible. The self had changed and with its negative and uncharacteristic behaviour, was strange and threatening. Its incongruity with the familiar world carried implications of loss, and gave rise to a willingness to acknowledge the truth and meet with change. Working though the laborious and repetitive struggle, the challenge of authenticity was accepted. Though

transition and change had been avoided in relation to the world, the self was now challenged to relate to change and transition.

8. With the threat of loss and fragmentation, the self submits to change.

The rupture of truth through the façade brought to awareness a different and disagreeable sense of self. Bursting through the surface, the surging force of omnipotence created by the struggle threatened to annihilate the self. In a desperate attempt to retain control and not lose the continuity of self, its world and meaningful others, the self sacrificed what it had become and submitted to change. Alienated from personal authenticity and feeling separate from the world and others, the self was threatened with fragmentation. The fear of annihilation and disintegration was real, which, with the need to take control, appropriated a different perspective to accept newness and submit to change.

Willingness to eventually take the ontological leap and accept change was pivotal, for in sacrificing the false sense of self that had evolved, a different perspective and a significant final decision were accepted and committed to. The self, in its continuity, acknowledged personal truth and reality, as growth and mobility were facilitated.

- Awareness of a negatively changed sense of self and the threat of fragmentation:

M67: I did not like myself anymore. It was easier to start picking fights. Where I know that I am someone who likes to communicate with people and laugh, I could see something change in me and I did not like it...I was missing the old me and I think that the people around me also did....I realised that I did not want to go on like that. Some people do. I could have gone on like that but then I would lose more in the end – even jeopardizing my marriage and my friends.

J44/45: The next morning I would think “Why did I explode like that so aggressively and so exaggerated. ...Then only did I realise that letting go was the problem. I said: “You have not let go. You are still there”.

P17: I didn't need to be there and I needed to go. I needed it for my own sanity.

- A different perspective appropriated change:

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J54: But now I had to go back and say: “You need to finish this off, and the only way to finish this off is to go back into the jungle and let the defences down, and work through it rather than just trying to get through it as quickly as possible”.

M57: The moment I did try and say, ‘O.K. I am going to try something else besides this anger’, (the darkness) just lifted. It was really like you could hear the angels sing.

B20: (A book) just reminded me that as a spiritual person and as a Christian, if I wanted to be like Jesus, I have to be able to let go of material things that keep me on my task and financial security and just being able to make money.

9. With the evolving separateness, the need for relatedness continues.

The space created gives rise to an increasing and profound awareness of separateness and aloneness, with an emerging need to retain human interconnectedness. The process of letting go revealed a relational basis. Separateness and oneness were dialectical, and while the existential aloneness of the experience created a sense of alienation, defending against the threat of isolation and abandonment seemed imperative. In the face of the challenge to let go, the participants needed to know that others were in the same or a similar situation and that they were not alone, while a preoccupation with the self was avoided. For example, before Participant P would commit to the significant final decision, the impact of the impact that the decision would have on the (significant) other was first taken into account. Concern for, and sensitivity to, the needs of others revealed a capacity to overlook personal interest and avoid being self-centred.

Though attempts were made to evade facing the truth of personal feelings, it was in the close relationship with the significant other that such confrontation revealed itself. In the shared reality of the relationship with the significant other, aspects of the truth came to the fore. Remaining attached to the significant other, and/or being aware of relevant or extended others in the same or similar situation mitigated existential aloneness and facilitated mobility. The presence of the significant other was reassuring and served as a point of attachment, while a positive focus on the future provided a link in the unknown and facilitated mobility. Close identification with another provided a sense of attachment, along with the desired sense of sharing and connectedness, reducing the space that

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threatened with isolation. Throughout the process, awareness of a personal relatedness to the world remained significant as interpersonal connectedness had to be retained.

- Acknowledging the presence of the significant other in the same experience:

P27: So (the decision) was like this going back and forth, but the same thing was happening to Jack (spouse)....

K28/29/30: But I felt so guilty not being there. You know Keith (spouse) took it much easier, but that's letting go; that they(adolescent children) can go...and do their own thing and we (as parents) can actually also do our own thing.

M8: If I do go and sit in the corner, I will just die and I will just drag everybody that is supporting me, especially my husband, my parents, his parents. They would have been grandparents for the first time. So it's not just myself but it's a lot of people around me as well. They also pretend to be strong to carry you.

- Acknowledging the presence of extended others, in a similar/same process.

M 87: I started looking around and I saw people...mothers who have lost their children in accidents. You realise that you are not alone...People in pain as well.

K12: I can see it with some of the other mothers that come to me with their teenagers...They are at loggerheads not with the stuttering problem but with their interpersonal relationship and not being this overprotective mother.

- The close relationship with the significant other provided the context for truth to reveal itself:

M63: I realised that because Larry (spouse) and I have a fantastic relationship... I started picking up signs that something is wrong. Although I thought that I was fine, Larry (spouse) and myself, we started to quarrel. It would usually come from my side. I just realised that something is wrong.

- In the absence of the significant other values and beliefs replaced the link

B22/23: You have to offer a lot and let go in order to experience a new life. That's what Jesus did. The only thing in life, is adding significance to other people's lives. Helping

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people who are suffering and refocus on that again after I let go of the things, maybe its very difficult to let go of, (like) letting go of my salary...Security is based on other things...Not that I see myself as perfect, but I am trying to be guided by spiritual Christian values.

- Acknowledging the needs of the (significant) other rather than the self:

M10: What helped me was that I knew that I could not approach (letting go) in a selfish way. I couldn't go and think it's just myself. There were a lot of people who went through this as well...

K24: I can't get (my anger) out on (the adolescent children). I think sometimes that's letting go, that understanding

P14/15: I had to check with him (spouse). I also took into consideration the fact that he was working...He had to back me up because it's a selfish decision.

B25: It's basically to think a bit more before you do anything and not only to think about yourself, but also to think about others.

10. The quest for balance and stability continues throughout the letting-go process.

Ambivalent perceptions and ambiguity had commenced with the early uncertainty and doubt relating to the initial decision. The self would vacillate between the diverse polarities, moving to and fro, towards and away from change. Disequilibrium reigned, as ambiguity reverberated from the outset, through the struggle into the new world, but reduced in intensity once balance and stability were attained. This process was gradual.

Having survived the intensity of the struggle and arriving in the unfamiliar environment of the new world, resonance of the ambivalence continued with attempts to restore a familiar order. Moving from the known to unknown was challenging, for balance and equilibrium had to be maintained. The quest for stability continued as attempts were made to replace negative perceptions with positive experiences and meaning. Positive perceptions provided balance to the negativity experienced. The gap between the polarised points had to be bridged and a solution found. With the experience of ambiguity in the new world, there was a conscious effort to convert negative perceptions

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into positive valuations. Such transformation provided clarity and direction, and a positive view of the future provided motivation and facilitated mobility forward. Though earlier negative perceptions were initially held on to, they were gradually altered and replaced as new meaning was created. Meaningful past familiarities were retained and held on to. In the ambiguity of the process, positive (past, present and future) aspects were pursued for the stability and balance they provided. As the process continued to unfold, the positive replaced negativity, until stability was finally attained. The change was gradual.

In the different environment/world, the newness of interpersonal relationships brought a sense of being dissimilar. The sense of belonging and oneness in relation to the familiar environment had been lost. In the face of this, there was a desire to establish a renewed sense of oneness in relation to the new environment. Acknowledging what was lacking elicited a desire to seek fulfilment and pursue the positive ideal. With one of the participants (P), however, loss of the positive aspect attained in the new world, led to a return to the past and a revival of earlier negative emotions, obscuring the present and impeding mobility forward. However, where there was not a return to the past, the clarity of the present motivated efforts to meet the increasing newness, as the foreign aspects encountered were personalised in an effort to regain a sense of the familiar order. In the new environment/world, returning to a familiar order of at-homeness and at-easeness, was a priority. In spite of the threat of instability and feelings of despair and helplessness, the self continuously sought to restore a harmony with life. Though change was slow, the quest for balance and stability was continuous, as newness was tested and trust allowed to develop.

- In the ambiguous perception of the new world, the quest for stability continued:

P34: There is nothing wrong with these people but they are all Afrikaans. There is not a soul that is English-speaking and I feel a bit of a foreigner. I feel a bit of an outsider but these people are wonderful because they all like their privacy... .

B31: I'm so busy dealing with all the new things. I think, like with many other things in life, my current experience in the USA can be seen as an attempt to find the balance between the negative and positive sides of the same thing.

J 61: Initially you have this good and bad balance and the bad, just, just outweighs the good, otherwise you would not have made the split. I would not have taken my bags and gone my merry way if the good did outweigh the bad.

M59: At the time it was just being miserable. I (now) believe that from the pain something beautiful will come your way.

11. Descriptive figurative language explicates sharing the experience.

In the absence of a tangible context for the experience of letting go, various attempts were made to capture its ineffable quality and share the experience through descriptive language. The experience was shared in the dual relationship with the researcher, and in the process of providing descriptions metaphorical depictions were used.

The experience was described as a “bungie-jump” or “parachute jump” that is akin to taking a risky leap into the unknownness of space. Images of a ship sailing in turbulent and stormy seas would attempt to explicate the efforts to maintain stability, continuity and survival. Although not evident throughout the protocols, images of light and dark were frequently used. The images of light and dark seemed to describe the experienced polarities of the self and the ambiguity of being. Through using images of light and dark there was an attempt to illustrate the presence of knowledge, peace and tranquillity (light) or its absence (darkness). The mobility of moving from the unknown to the known seemed to determine the extent of the light present. Though turbulent, the comfort of the familiar darkness was often held on to. Change, in its unknownness, was approached with hesitance. Nevertheless, although often evaded, the “pull” of the light was continuously pursued, and, by attempting to convert negative values into positive ones, the quest throughout the process was for peace, balance and stability. In spite of the ambiguity, the peace and clarity envisaged in the light of the future provided motivation to survive the struggle, move from the darkness or confusion and continue forward. Though the change was gradual, a positive focus on the future facilitated the process. With the continuous threat of instability, the focus was to enter the light and find peace, clarity and stability.

- Metaphoric language was used to explicate the experience:

J87: The waters are settled. The wind has stopped howling. The sun is rising and it is clear... As you can see a storm building, in the same way I can see the storm almost nearing the end. Some of the clouds are subsiding and I know instinctively that I am almost there where the sun will break through....

M58: It (finding new meaning) really was like opening a gift slowly. You first pull the ribbon and then the paper. The stages that I had to go through to appreciate what there is, but I took it as a gift because of the intensity of the dark.

12. Resolution of the process transforms the self.

All the participants had not resolved their experience of letting go. While only one participant (M) had achieved full resolution, others (B, J, P) were either in the final phase or still in the process of letting go (K). While persistent holding on impeded mobility, letting go facilitated acceptance of the present and its contextual realities. Finding resolution and successfully completing the process was not immediate. Accepting change in the face and threat of instability was to meet the challenge of letting go and to move on. To move on was to grow, because finding resolution and surviving the struggle gave rise to a renewed, empowered and enriched sense of self. The transformation was illuminating and dispelled existing doubts, providing the conviction of being on the right path. Awe and wonder followed the resolution of the intense struggle, while the clarity and awareness of light following the storm of the crisis was welcomed with euphoria. A greater awareness of the present arose with a willingness to accept the present as well as the inevitable challenges that lay ahead. Resolution at having moved through the process led to a positive sense of self with a sense of fulfilment and tranquillity. The gaining of new meaning, fresh knowledge and insights provided opportunity for greater personal integration and self-understanding. The relationship to the self, world and others expanded with an awareness of new horizons. While most participants sought to avoid or fill the gap created, willingness to face the gap lead to a transpersonal (spiritual) experience and the belief of a close encounter with life and its meaning.

- A renewed and empowered sense of self emerged:

M82: It's as if I can face anything coming my way now. To come through with an answer like that, you can take anything. I feel that I will be strong in life.

J89/90: Maybe it (letting go) creates new issues. I don't know, but I can get through it.

- An encounter with life and its meaning:

B26/27: It's just that (the experience) was very rational before, but I have lived it as an experience now...I think that I learned that I had to let go of certain more material things... in order to open up to new and more value based and spiritual based avenues and paths and you come closer to what I experience as my purpose in life.

M74: That's why I say, for me it was a growing up process in the sense of what life is about. I have the tools to cope with life.

5.5 Structural Synthesis

Letting go is a transitional process that evolves over time, confronting the self to meet with change and move on. The process is rotational as the past is returned to, to meet with the present and face the future. Memories are significant in retaining continuity, while new meaning and a positive focus on the future facilitate the process. To let go is to submit to, and enter the unknown space and time of nothingness.

Entering the unknownness of space and time elicits a fear of loss and feelings of anxiety. Space and distance increase as a sense of separateness unfolds, and there is fear of isolation. With the threat of change, the desire for sameness continues, as the familiar is held on to, providing a sense of wholeness and oneness. Holding on sustains and stabilises and is experienced as an essential link to life. Decisions are pivotal to the process, and made in an attempt to determine steps into a specific future and to retain

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control (hold on). An initial decision provides knowledge and insight for a significant subsequent decision that is committed to later.

In retaining attachments to the familiar, a façade contains and conceals personal truth. A masked sense of being emerges, where activities increase, with intensified efforts to evade facing the truth. The façade deceives the interpersonal world, but also deceives the self from believing in its personal integrity and stability. However, in spite of attempts to evade the reality of change and retain a constant state of oneness in relation to the world, the self does not remain stagnant. In the existential crossroad of the decision, conflicting thoughts arise and the self is challenged to a repetitive and paradoxical struggle. With oscillating thoughts and vacillating feelings, the self spins in a whirlpool of circularity going nowhere, experiencing entrapment and immobility. Cognitive efforts increase to retain control, while an overpowering force to let go challenges personal will.

In the conflict between the demands of the social façade (holding on) and the increasing demands for the revelation of personal truth (letting go), intensifies. A contradictory and paradoxical realm unfolds between covert feelings and overt behaviour. In the state of ambiguity, feelings of ambivalence arise. Letting go becomes a lived struggle where thoughts oscillate, behaviour vacillates and emotions swing from one extreme to another, as the self is repeatedly pushed and pulled in approaching and avoiding change. The process is painful, for, while the meaning of personal truth intensifies, the demand for reality persists.

The oscillating process of swinging from one pole to another regarding the decision repeats itself, until its resolution. Either with slow shifts of awareness, or with sudden outbursts that have taken time to emerge, with time the truth ruptures through the façade. The self becomes aware of having changed, but with a negative concept of self. In the confronting awareness, personal stability, self-integrity and meaningful relationships are threatened and a shift emerges, motivating the turning point for the subsequent significant decision to personally commit to change and accept a new meaningful perspective. Thus, with the threat of fragmentation, the existing sense of self finally submits to change.

Though thrust into an existential separateness and sense of aloneness, the need for relatedness continues. The presence of the (significant) other remains fundamental, in the knowledge that the experience is shared. Though space is personally defined, the threat of isolation is defended against. Through concern for the (significant) other, the desired

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attachment is retained. While truth is evaded regarding the self, it is in the close relationship with the significant other that truth ruptures the façade and reveals itself. In the absence of the (significant) other, the presence of values and beliefs becomes a valuable replacement, facilitating transition. Throughout the process, there is a need to retain the “presence” of the significant other as part of the self, and the quest for balance and stability continues. In the new world, the ambiguity of being prevails in the ‘to-and-fro’ swing between positive and negative valuations. The self seeks to reduce the threatening gap that exists between the polarities, with efforts to re-establish the equilibrium of a familiar order. As the quest for stability continues, ambivalence facilitates shifts to positive perceptions.

Descriptive figurative language facilitates explication of the experience, while retaining the empathic connectedness of sharing. The self attempts to find a common ground from which to share the ineffable experience. In the quest for balance and stability, while the positive value of light (relief, tranquillity, knowledge and balance) is continuously pursued, the negativity of darkness (pain, turmoil, the unknown, and instability) is evaded as the challenge is met and resolution achieved. The process is gradually resolved and worked through. Positive valuations gradually replace negative perceptions and new meaning emerges. Having survived the struggle and turbulence, restoring the preferred order of stability is regarded as a successful completion of the process and an achievement. Fresh appreciation for the present unfolds, while willingness to enter the gap creates the opportunity for a transpersonal experience, and the belief of having come closer to the meaning of life. To have let go is to have moved through the darkness of the unknown into the light of the known. Letting go provides a sense of enrichment and empowerment, with feelings of confidence and competence. Having let go involves a transformation of self and is a personal developmental achievement, while in the existential aloneness of the experience, a sense of related-separateness is maintained.

Essential Structure

Letting go is a transitional process of spiral mobility, as the past is returned to (and repeated) to meet with the challenge of change in the present and submit to the unknownness of one’s spatiality and temporality. As change threatens with loss and

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isolation, the desire for sameness continues, while a façade conceals and contains the truth as a conflicting struggle arises and a gap emerges in approaching and avoiding change. In the quest for stability, a sense of continuity is held on to, as memories fill the gap in relation to the past and new meaning fills the gap that threatens in the future. With the threat of disintegration, change is submitted to, but in an attempt to gain control, decisions are made, while positive focus on the future is helpful. Creating new meaning and finding resolution is an achievement that gives rise to a sense of omnipotence and empowerment. The self is transformed in the process.