

CHAPTER THREE: THE MAIN CHARACTERS OF THE RESEARCH (CO-RESEARCHERS)

3.1 THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

3.1.1 Changing the main characters of this research

As I indicated earlier, in Chapter One, I encountered some difficulty in finding interview volunteers, particularly remarried families, for this research. There were many setbacks at the start of this research. After searching from church to church, one day I received a call from a remarried family who indicated that they would like to participate in this project. I was beside myself with joy, but was frustrated again, as the father did not arrive at the time and the place appointed. He had been hospitalized. I was introduced to another remarried family by a pastor ministering in Pretoria. This couple was very excited about my project at first. We met and I explained my methodology and the purpose of this research. They signed a consent form for the research. However, before long, this too proved to be a fruitless endeavour. According to the pastor, they did not want to meet me again. He explained that they were carrying a big burden, because they were considering divorce.

After all these setbacks, I consulted my supervisor, Prof. J. Müller, who is in charge of Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. He advised me to change my topic and so I decided to interview primarily two adolescents in remarried families. I purposively and thoughtfully chose (Babbie

& Mouton 2001:288) them from among Grade Nine students in a Christian high school in Pretoria.

3.1.2 Meeting the main characters from remarried family stories for the research

The main characters (the co-researchers) of the research are discussed here. In this chapter, two groups of characters for this research are set out. The one group consisted of two adolescents, a girl and a boy from remarried families, who became as the main characters. The second consisted of voices of other people around the main characters. All the co-researchers within the stories of the adolescents are white South Africans living in Pretoria; they are 14 years old and come from a Dutch Reformed Christian faith community. They are all friends and schoolmates of my son.

3.1.2.1 Premises for selecting the co-researchers

On the basis of the following questions (my premises), I purposely made contact with adolescents in remarried families. Firstly, do I know them and *vice versa*, and have we spent time together before? Secondly, did they need space to tell their stories as my research aim stated? For that reason, I was concerned that we had at least some basic relationship, because without it, storytelling and listening could be mechanically conducted. I had already noticed at the start of this project that although the aims of this research were beneficial for the provisional interviewees and they were interested in it, their preference and

priorities in their routine were not my project, even though it was my priority.

Lastly, to choose two adolescents from remarried families, I curiously but thoughtfully divided the broader sample population into two categories labelled by language: the so-called “troublesome student” and “model student”. The reason I chose the two types arose from my curiosity, which I reflected at an early age. For what reasons are adolescents called “troublesome” or “models”? Do they agree with these labels? Who identifies them like that? Do they categorize themselves by themselves, their peers, other people around them such as their teachers and parents, or certain rules? With these premises I took the first steps towards interviewing the co-researchers.

- In order to contact them, I approached my son’s classmates through him.
- After I had met them, introduced my project, making sure of their will to participate, I sent a consent form to their parents.
- Also, I reported their participation to the principal of their school. The headmaster helped me from the beginning of this project and introduced some students from remarried families to me as potential interviewees. From among them, I selected two on the basis of my premise; one was a girl, a so-called “model student”; the other was a “typical” boy, classified as “troublesome”.
- Afterwards, we set meetings for three months, with two hours per meeting. The time frame and place was discussed with the co-researchers: this discussion allowed them to dictate some of the terms and it was a way to

disempower my position.

3.1.3 Interviewing the co-researchers

3.1.3.1 Recruiting an assistant

Because one of my co-researchers was a girl, I had to create a comfortable zone for her, so I employed a female assistant. Also, owing to the difficulty of making my spoken English understood, I needed a person who could make communication fluent. As mentioned earlier, I had some relationship with my co-researchers before they became volunteers. When I engaged in casual and informal talk with them, I realized they were struggling to understand my English and I too was having difficulty understanding theirs. That is why I needed my assistant. That does not mean that the language barrier interfered with our conversation. However, I acted out of my conviction and responsibility to create a comfortable environment for the co-researchers.

- I recruited as my assistant someone who has a lot of experience in adolescent ministry, working for years in the church.
- I trained her according to the principles and philosophy of a narrative conversational interview, and explained the aims of this project.
- I remunerated her as a token of my gratitude to her.
- She interviewed the girl and mainly conducted the group-meeting stages.
- Before every interview session, she and I had a workshop to practise questioning and conducting interviews.
- After every session, I, first of all, listened to the audio-tape of the session

and gave her advice on her questioning in the interview, and suggestions for additional exploration for the following session.

- Secondly, we invested some time in evaluating our work with regard to our attitude, use of language, interview mood, the quality of the co-researchers' participation, and so forth. Also, we shared our feelings and inspirations from the interview in the evaluation, which later became the work of a reflection group.

3.1.3.2 *Reducing the gap between the co-researchers and the researcher*

Living in South Africa, I have encountered some cultural misunderstandings. I will share my cultural blindness in more depth at a later stage. The attitude of South African children towards adults, teachers and friends' parents, for example, is different from that of children in North America, where I lived for some years. Whenever friends of my children in South Africa see me, they address me as "sir", which I have never heard from North American children. I personally interpreted this attitude as an attempt at showing their respect to their friend's parents. However, in terms of my research, it could negatively influence their talk in our conversation to a greater or lesser degree. Also, our relationship was a little strange or peculiar. I am, on the one hand, the father of their friend, and can speak to their school principal as an equal. On the other hand, I am yellow (Korean like the Chinese actor and comedian, Jackie Chan) and my way of speaking is "very funny". The above facts were enough to let my co-researchers feel that the relationship was odd.

Thus, I planned to reduce the gap between us through my deconstruction of the power structure as follows:

- Before starting a session on a Friday, I picked them up from their school on Friday and we always had lunch, chatting together. I also gave them a ride to their homes.
- By using letters as a tool for “extending the conversation” (Epston 1994: 31), I could also build up a close relationship with them. In my letters, I always addressed my co-researchers with the intentional words, “my little friend”. The reason for this arose from my personal experience that when an older person calls and regards me as his friend, I feel friendship with him without losing my respect for him. In this regard, Winslade and Monk’s (2000:138) opinion about the order of speakers in conversation is applicable to the research: “Cobb notes that the first person to tell her or his story in a mediation has a shaping effect on what the other person can speak about. In the terms we have been using, the first speaker’s utterance calls the other person into position in response.” Thus, I conclude that using a word or calling somebody something also influences the quality of the response from the other person.

According to Oakley (1985:41), “the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship”. Therefore, throughout the daily routine, I tried, as far as possible, to bring my deconstruction of the power

structure into our project in order to reduce any negative impact on it.

3.1.4 Listening to other voices

Although I intended listening mainly to adolescents in remarried families, for the sake of a better understanding of the background and context of my co-researchers, I paid attention to other voices as well, instead of traditional researchers' voices utilizing quantitative methods on remarried families and their children. In Chapter Four, I introduce various products of traditional researchers' view regarding remarried families and their children. These products would be invited into our dialogue with the other voices and my co-researchers' voices.

In order to do that, I interviewed two schoolteachers and two South African pastors. In the end, the pastors' voices were omitted from this report, because their opinions were very similar to those of the teachers. These voices were helpful in supporting my co-researchers' voices and offering new perspectives, enabling a new dialogue to occur (Smith & Nylund 1997:43). By contrast, they could also be agents of propagandist meta-narratives on adolescents in remarried families. Therefore, we, my co-researchers and I, needed to listen carefully and critically to their voices.

The process of conversing with them and the adolescents on our topic took the following form: I interviewed the adolescents first, making an audio recording.

Subsequently, I sent a summary of the conversation to them in order to get feedback as to whether my understanding was accurate. Afterwards, I shared with the adolescents my summary of what was heard and observed, as well as what we discussed about it.

3.1.5 Interview agenda

I began with a brief explanation of the way my methodology works and explained to my co-researchers the order of the interview. This interview agenda would not be implemented in this precise order - when necessary, it could be adapted to suit the situation. For instance, a co-researcher suggested the idea that when we got to the last session, we would organize a party as a metaphor for the celebration of the milestone of their new stories, inviting their parents.

- *First stage:*

The first interview section was divided into two parts; one was an individual meeting, the other was a group meeting. In this section we covered the “here and now” of their story and the “background” surrounding them. We met three times for this part of the research.

- Firstly, in the individual stage, my co-researchers named their families or themselves. I asked them for an imaginary name for their families or themselves “to invent allusions” (Lyotard 1984:82) to their current situation. Afterwards, in every stage, we called one another by the

imaginary name each one had created. Their actual names were not used in each interview or in this dissertation.

- Secondly, in order to listen to them about their “here and now” stories and their past stories, I let them describe their current stories in terms of colours, and express their past in terms of various tastes, as representative of their situation, mood and emotion. I used colours and tastes because they were apt to be unable to begin telling from “where” and from “what”. In a therapeutic situation, according to Smith and Nylund (1997:43), some “clients may not know at the beginning of a session what they wish to focus on”. Thus, colouring one’s self is a tool to open space to tell a story. This imaginative work, the use of colours, involves visualizing the events of their lives. In doing so, they shared whole life events, drawing a graph on the Emotional Cycle of Life Event. (Refer to Appendix 2.)
- In the group meeting, all the participants, including myself, began by choosing colours for one another, sharing the reasons for the colours we chose. In doing this, we could see each other’s various colourful identities, not the self ultimately fixed or taken for granted. Then, we shared an Emotional Cycle of Life Event, on condition that the person was willing to do so. This tool was used not only in the first stage but also in the last stage of the research. By means of this tool, we could describe our interpreted life events as a whole in the first stage, but in the last stage, we could see our reinterpreted life events as well. When we shared the Emotional Cycle of Life Event openly in the group stage, we

could sense consolidation, partnership and “re-membering” (Kelly 2003; Kotzé & Kotzé 1997; White 1995a, 2000; Zimmerman & Dickerson 1996). Through this group activity, we got to know more about each other. This activity would be of great help in “re-membering” their relationships for their alternative future stories.

- Secondly, we compared and contrasted the co-researchers’ presentation of their own colours and those attached to them by others, and their “told stories”. By doing this, we looked at the existing social discourses and research assertions, such as the role of ambiguity in remarried families, the claim that children in remarried families are the most problematic or the greatest disrupters of the peace of remarried families, and that children are the most victimized or vulnerable among the family members and so on.
- In the second stage, before the second interview, they needed to create a preferred *imaginative future* role in their family and community by using a name or by choosing a symbol. In addition, they needed to make a list of possibilities of how they expected this role to work in their family and community. I sent my understanding of their told stories from the first interview via a letter to them, so as to get feedback from them as to whether my understanding of their stories was accurate and acceptable to them or whether I needed to reinterpret their stories.

- Second stage

We formed this stage not by dividing our meeting, but simply through the

group meeting. This section was the developmental phase of the metaphor of Fiction Writing research.

Finally, in the group meeting, and by collaborating with one another, we examined each person's successful methods and experiences of resolving conflict and of enhancing their family life in revisiting their past.

- To begin with, I discussed their feedback.
- Next, they presented their imaginative future story, created by themselves and their family.
- Lastly, we compared and contrasted this new story with the existing discourses that had been discussed in the first interview.
- Before the third interview started, I sent, on a weekly basis, a document of our interviews arranged around various themes.

- *Third stage:*

The third stage began one month after the second interview. We finalized this study, finding common themes on influences of members in the family, evaluating our previous work and finally co-operating to re-construct a name for the remarried family as required by my co-researchers.

3.2 WE ARE HERE: THE CO-RESEARCHERS' STORIES

True to a pastoral narrative approach whose methodological process is based on Fiction Writing (A (action), B (background), D (development), C (climax), E (ending)) model as a metaphor for research as formulated by Müller *et al.* (2001), the first part of our collaborative conversation dealt with the "here and

now” stories of my co-researchers, through telling and listening. This process did not cling rigidly to the ABDCE process, but was flexible. It rode the wave of stories of my co-researchers.

Practically, in the interviews, the research was not imposed strictly and was somewhat arbitrary. Thus, the written format also followed the flow of the stories. That does not mean that I ignored a writing structure, but I thoroughly considered the processes of my co-researchers’ telling, retelling and visiting the past and revisiting it.

In order to help the reader understand my co-researchers, I first set up a summary of the stories and then divided the transcript into detailed sections, into the themes which emerged. To sum up the stories, I implemented the writing style of a chronological novel, which favoured the narrator. In my writing, the quotation marks signify the actual words of the narrators. I did not correct the grammar of their utterances. The reason for this is that I wanted to preserve their real voices as far as possible, embracing their hesitations, iterations, repetitions, equivocations and so on.

3.2.1 The story of Co-researcher One

Light²: I am 14 years young, like writing songs, enjoy dancing, drawing and playing guitar. My nickname as seen in the teachers’ minds, but not in [that of] my peers in school, is a troubled boy. This name came to me when I got

² Light is the narrator’s imaginary name.

detention in the school. I have four brothers; only one is my blood brother, the rest are stepbrothers living with me.

3.2.1.1. *Overview of the “once upon a time” story*

Once upon a time there was a guy who received a dream from God through my mom. One night, He appeared in her dream, saying that “when you deliver a baby, name him ‘xxx’ as metaphor of a leader of mine like Joshua in the Old Testament.” Almost at the same time, a pastor, xxx in Klerksdorp, met her and told her that he had received words of God in his prayer, one that names her baby ‘xxx’. Born in the mystic event and the family, I was blessed and many people have said I was so handsome and looked as smart as my name connotes. I had great happy times with both my parents in my childhood. I played football with my father in the garden. When I was hungry, my mom prepared food and when I needed her hands, they were always around me. My life was easy, fun and enjoyable by nature when in childhood.

All of sudden, a great storm blew up with dark clouds in my unconsciousness, swallowed my family and destroyed the family, sending them out of my control. I was powerless at the strange gate of turmoil. I could do nothing at all; I was incapable of stopping it and to prevent my parents from divorcing even though I was a promised child of God who chooses to install me as His servant and a leader of His people.

My beloved father, who is a computer designer, left us to earn money in England. Years later, he called his wife and demanded a divorce. As a result, I unwillingly moved to my grandparents' house and had to separate from my most sweet mom for six years. Even though I wanted to live with my biological father, my request was rejected. In six years I got a call from my biological father just once, and on that day, I expressed my anger at him and got a promise from my father that he would call again and email me and yet nothing happened. Owing to that, I started smoking when frustration invaded me. "You not gonna care, I am not gonna care".

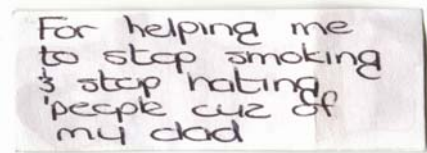
During the period of living with my grandparents, I had compelling experiences in person of what bitterness is all about and what the meaning of abusiveness is. Bitterness was far and near and set its seat as the main character of and in my childhood. One particular anecdote is that one day I accidentally spilled coffee on the carpet during a prayer meeting at my grandfather's house, then the word "stupid child" fried up and landed on my face and a big palm covered it with enormous power.

Time did not stop flowing; gradually my circumstances were changed, regardless of my intention. I had to move a lot, so I had a struggle to make friends and because of that, I was forced to be silent. Two years ago I achieved my dream of living with my mom after she remarried. She is an architect. Her current husband is a singer. However, I felt change at the expense of the achieved dream, one thing is that her attention towards me is different from

before. I cannot see her often and she cannot spend much time with me, which never happened in my early childhood.

However, I am busy renovating my old house and building a new future house.

“I’m just looking [at] my future instead of staying in the past...He[God] just umm...always confirms me that He gives me talents and I must use them and He gave me a gift, and that I must use it...and.” One clue he showed was that “I tried to get rid of smoking gradually...I am busy changing for where I was once upon a time”. After saying the above, the protagonist of the story gave me a little tag:



3.2.1.2 *The story in detail*

The various images the protagonist picked up to describe himself and his current inner and outer status were summed up with a rainbow. It consisted of his interpretation of his here and now in bright [white]³ and dark [black] colours. They are cryptic and exuberant resources for him on which to build his future house. Yet, they are also concealed behind many problem-saturated and taken-for-granted stories. They contain both the bitter and the sweet.

● ***Bright and dark***

³ In fact, he used the colours black and white but with his consent I changed them to bright and dark. We decided this because the colours black and white could cause unnecessary fuss (about racism) in a South African context.

One side of his life is light, which is white, when he is happy. Most of his white and sweet story deals with relationships with his biological mom, older brother, friends and the God of Christianity. This story would help him take darkness out of his life and develop his story towards his future.

Questioner: If you describe yourself as a colour, what colour do you see yourself as?

Light: "Colour? Let, see...Can I use more than one?"

Q: Why not! Of course you can.

L: "Bright [white] and dark [black] because I am not so sure what to do, one side of my life is like umm...light, which is bright [white] when I am like happy. Dark [black] is just there."

- ***Bright (happiness)***

Q: Rainbow is bright and dark?? Bright is like happiness?

L: "Yeah, let me say, my mom is bright, my brother [older brother] is green and stuff. Yeah, when I visit my friends, having fun, I'm happy."

Q: Tell me more in detail.

L: "Like, going to movie with my brother and talking with him, talking with mom when she is not busy. She was always there when I needed help, always around me." In addition, he felt that his older brother has taken a paternal role which, according to him, his biological father has to fulfil for his family and him.

- ***Bright = Mom's "being there"***

At first in this conversation, he was in “bright” and “dark” again and again, because he kept shifting back and forth. He felt that without his consciousness and knowing his sweetness and brightness, he was just there as his darkness was. However, throughout our attentive conversation we could both reach a potential conclusion that we needed to talk to augment our happiness. His older brother has offered him the space to talk. His mother has held the tremendous side of sweetness in his life. She has been always around him, whenever he needed help, she was always there. In this case, I was curious about the meaning of “his mother’s being there”. He commented on “mom’s being there” as her attention towards him.

His emotional attachment to his mother was different from that to his biological father (his attachment to his father will be discussed later). His longing for his mother’s attention plays a crucial role in the developmental phase of his life. He said: “Mom’s attention is very important for me because I need her opinion, umm...I don’t know in English... ‘*wysheid*’ [wisdom] .. Sometimes she just gets angry at me, but I don’t know why? So I try to talk but she said, “nothing”, but I know, something is there with her.”

- ***Motherhood by talking and listening***

Overall, “mom’s being there” means his mother’s being a mentor who can give her opinion and wisdom to him. He desires to get attention from her about her talking when he needs her to say something. His mindset about

the value of talking was revealed in his description of his older brother. “Older brother is green which is cool and relaxing colour. He is like father, we talk a lot, and stuff, and he’s done for me what father [biological father] was supposed to do.”

In his descriptive language, “being there” connoted paying attention to somebody, which implies being a mentor through talking and listening. He was eager to talk and longed to be listened to. In talking and being listened to, he could be and feel sweet in his relationship with his mother and his older brother. In conclusion, one of his thoughts about motherhood is that it takes place in talking and listening. Of the many themes in this research, telling and listening was one of great importance and it was continuously addressed in this research.

- ***Dark (Bitter)***

The narrator’s dark story is presented here in accordance with the above bright and sweet story. He kept moving back and forth in telling his dark story, which was intimately connected with his story of brightness and sweetness.

Light: “I don’t like step-dad, instead, I want to get back my real dad. That is dark, I mean step-dad. He is dark...I don’t want to talk with him because I don’t really know him so I don’t know actually what I say to him...”

Q: You don’t know him very well? So, you don’t want to talk of your personal stuff with him?

L: “Not really, but because I didn’t have a dad, I don’t trust, like, my dad, I don’t know...I’ve lived with him just for a year, I just need to talk to him, trust

him...I just have to talk to him. ”

- ***The root of darkness***

Through the above explorative conversation, it appeared that his darkness was coming from his problematic relationship with his stepfather, but that was not true. He just mentioned the difficulty of having a conversation with him: that was his method of improving the relationship with his stepfather in his mind. The main cause of darkness was initiated by his biological father, who is living in England and who has not responded to his telephone calls and emails for seven years. His father has only phoned him twice in seven years, even though he promised to call his son often. That has affected him and pushed him towards darkness and prompted him to do rebellious things, for example, smoking. The narrator said: “You not gonna care, I am not gonna care”. In our first meeting, he admitted that he still missed his biological father a lot and was eager to receive his father’s response via phone or email.

- ***The other cause of his darkness***

According to him, the darkness was derived from himself. He knew that he did not like his stepfather, but felt that he could not accept him because of the obstacle caused by longing for his biological father. Also, he was struggling against his anger when I conversed with him. Two months later, however, he had eventually got over it, at least in my view. I will introduce his winning story later.

Q: Where is darkness coming from? As you said, is it coming from your stepfather side?

L: “No, no, no umm...usually umm...because umm...I hated my anger because [of] my dad [biological father] I don’t want to with anybody, I don’t want to, like, associate, whatever, with anybody else that makes me pressure by myself and something like that...and usually when I don’t actually do something, something like that, my mom accuses me, then I’m angry at my mom easily and then, yeah!”

- **Anger one**

In his darkness story, he and I agreed on the fact that he did not dislike his stepfather and his darkness did not come from him, but rather, it was anger and the anger was based on his need to gain acceptance and attention from his biological father. “I’m not actually angry at him [my stepfather], but angry at myself because I can’t really accept him because of my other father [biological father].” He has lived this emotional attachment to his biological father.

However, through our “externalizing conversation” (Freedman *et al.* 1997; Morgan 1999; Roberts 1994; Smith & Nylund 1997; White 2000; White & Epston 1990), he started to draw the line between his darkness and causes of it, one of which was derived from his longing to receive attention continuously from his biological father. Given his broken and frustrated anticipation, he has been hampered in creating intimacy, not only with his

stepfather, but also with others. He saw that a byproduct of this broken heart was, as he named it, “anger” which always relates to his anticipation of a response from his biological father. This anger was contagious with regard to his other relationships.

- ***Anger two: The past was bitter***

Another source of anger was rooted in living with his grandfather for a long time after his mother was informed of the divorce by his father. He remembered that his grandfather was very strict and indifferent towards him. He scolded him very harshly when he made even a trifling mistake: “One day I accidentally spilled coffee on the carpet during a prayer meeting at grandfather’s house, then the word “stupid child” fried up and landed on my face and a big palm covered on it with an enormous power.” He called this abusive experience the “bitterness” of his past.

- ***Another bitterness***

He remembered that he moved a lot. Because of that, he had difficulty in making friends and became secluded, keeping silent. He said: “Always silence and self-struggle is there.” He likes friends, playing sports with them. Yet, in his past, he could not afford it. When I asked him what makes him happy, he said, “Being happy?, Umm...visiting friends, having activities with them, play sports...”

One anecdote with regard to having fun with friends was that he often forgot

or did not keep to our meeting schedule, as he had appointments with his friends. This occurred even after I had confirmed a meeting in some way. I interpreted this as an indication that being with his friends was a top priority in his routine. This attitude was not an aspect of his “problematic behaviour”, but his constant moving had resulted in his choice of his priorities and schedule. I presented this interpretation to him and he laughed. He said: “Can be, anyways, unfortunately I lost that time.” He attributed all of his “darkness”, including anger and bitterness, to a lack of attention from and acceptance by his biological father. His comment was: “My past is bitter because, yeah, he [father] was not there when [I was] growing up.”

3.2.1.3 *The start of an alternative view on his story*

- ***About his biological father***

Light’s story did not demean his story although it was already somewhat overwhelmed by the bitterness. Thus, I questioned him with a view to developing the story. The purpose of my questioning was to gain “developmental information” (Smith & Nylund 1997:4). This was a form of what Amundson and Stewart (1993:118) call “a therapy of curiosity”. For this project, I employed their words as “a research of curiosity”. In this sense, I shared my story about my father who had passed away before I was born. As a result, I did not have any feeling of attachment him. Therefore, I did not quite understand his attachment to his father. I shared this story with him. From the second stage of our interview, in as far as he longed for

acceptance from his biological father, he gradually took the path of splitting darkness from his father and his relationship with others. He thereby disjoined it from his life.

Q: (After sharing my story) Do you think his attention toward you is very significant? Is it very helpful to you to build your future home? Why?

L: “No ...it used to be that attention of my father, now probably that it’s my future because I know my father’s not gonna give me any attention....so I’m not gonna worry about what he was to do...oh...oh his attention towards me, because umm...[repeating the above sentence] I’m not gonna care, I’m just looking to my future instead of staying in the past.”

Q: Do you mean by saying “I’m not gonna care about him” that you try to be indifferent towards him? Or, what? And how can you put the darkness aside?

L: “Well, I need forgiveness. I need to pray, ask God, forgive me for the anger I had and then I ask myself to forgive my dad, I think I’d better I have to forgive my father...I have to phone him, tell him ‘I have forgiven’ and then...towards EMIMME [a popular singing group] laying the devil, like, come, like, uses me, destroys me as a person that people, like, look at me. And then I need ask forgive for my dad and ask lots of forgiveness.”

As transcribed above, he wanted to ask forgiveness for himself first. That suggests that he began to think of the attribution of his darkness as anger’s

work in advance. He initiated a reinterpretation of darkness as not his dad, but as the devil who tries using and destroying him by using anger as it is, not as the protagonist is. In order to resist this, he was implementing forgiveness on himself and his dad against the anger. This anger had detrimental effects on his life.

- ***About anger***

He used to live with aggression born from living with his grandparents, but through a re-association with people in the church, he started to look back on the “once upon a time-dream” of being a leader of the people of God. He used to blow up when his mother blamed him as if he had done something wrong. However, he did not merely stay in this place. In his telling, he often used the terms “used”, “I thought”, and “unconsciously”. Therefore, I utilized questioning again as my compassion towards him, like “therapeutic loving” (Smith & Nylund 1997:23).

L: “I used to be aggressive but, umm...like, after that then I liked to decide to attend the church on a regular base umm...all people [in his church] said, ‘I pray for you’...His [God] plan for me isn’t aggressive...Stand to be calm and he [the storyteller] will be a leader...God has planned up...I must stop being angry.”

Q: You know sometimes anger is often out of control of myself in my experience. (I shared my story about anger exploding out of me.) What

method do you have to gain control of it? Have you tried your method to gain control over it?

L: "Ok, let me tell you several things."

- "Yeah, I just said [to] myself each time I'm not gonna get angry because getting angry is not gonna answer... doesn't give me any benefit...if they start talking someone, say something to you &^%\$... anyways, self-discipline is to ask yourself."
- "Also, what I can give in ...start living a lifestyle like a new person that doesn't show my anger any more... including people in the church [those who prayed for him] and stuff."
- "Keep on the path the Lord has got to me, ask Him for help, not to do it in the way I need it...I remember if I have needed Him, He is always being there. He changes my life. He always confirms me that He gives me talents and I must use it and He's given me a gift and that I must use it, using, like,...towards Him yeah...Because of that I started to think of myself."
- "I want to help my mom [who is living with him now]."

Q: Helping her is a method to stop being angry?

L: "Yeah, it makes me feel good because she is my sweet."

Q: How?

L: "I gonna obey her...do my schooling well...I can show umm...it's not meaningless for me to be here, actually I want to be here to make a success my life. I gonna obey her in love."

In order to manage his anger, he reminded himself of his vision first and then instilled it in people around him. In other words, in our conversation we commenced “re-membering” (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001; Morgan 2000; White 1995a ; 2000; Zimmerman & Dickerson 1996) to go forward. This work was to reconnect us with our past and with others (Novy 2002:223) and involved re-considering our past events through our collaborative imaginative questioning and imaginative memory (Madigan 1997:339). We have facilitated this “re-membering” in our group meetings to reinforce and strengthen our alternative stories.

- ***About the stepfather***

We had already concluded that his stepfather was not the cause of his darkness; as yet, he was still a stranger to him. Indeed, through a re-investigating conversation, I could see his endeavour to improve his relationship with his stepfather. Also, fortunately, I could reach one constructive definition regarding the stepfather by chance. The remarking of the storyteller that “I don’t know him very well”, did not mean that he really did not know him, but rather, he meant that he was not able to accept him as his father because “I didn’t have dad, like, he was there. I should have a real dad”.

- ***Image of the stepfather***

At that moment, I was speechless for a while because I could not find a

relatively relevant question. He was possessed by the ghost of his biological father (Carter & McGoldrick1998:419). Thus, I tried to question him further by using images.

Q: What is the imagery of your stepfather in your mind?

L: (Thinking long time) “Water? Yeah, he is water because he got a lot of power...because water has a lot of power... because water can kill you, but it can save you.”

In this moment, I jumped to the conclusion that his stepfather was cruel or inexorable towards him. Consequently, I asked an invalid question. Even despite that, his story was enough to enable some understanding of his relationship with his stepfather and his thought about him. Besides, his continued story gave me a key to enhance the intimacy between the stepfather and the stepchildren.

L: “...Not happy with him, but better than nothing.”

Q: Better than nothing???

L: “I want to respect him like he was my dad, I said earlier, I should have a real dad...He is water, powerful, but he rather save than destroy you...His power is not threatening, but he got just power to tell me ‘you are not gonna there, I don’t give you money and stuff, something like that...he just pushes me.”

- ***The other side of the stepfather - a positive view***

He remembered a positive deed of his stepfather for him in the sense of “re-

membering”. From the manner of his telling of his view on his stepfather’s deed for him, I could see a seed of his developing relationship with his stepfather. This will be presented in Chapter Five: “He sent me to a proper school [his current school], well, I was in a proper school, but I mean...but [it] wasn’t like a real decent school. My mother was living alone with us, he was helping us like, he is helping me to develop my talents like guitar lessons and dancing and stuff. He’s still kind to her...He doesn’t have to do [it] but he does.”

- ***Improving the relationship with the stepfather: mutual telling and listening***

This dialogue gripped my attention enough to think of what the attitude in the dialogue between the children and their parents should be. He was struggling to converse with his stepfather because of a lack of space for mutual telling and listening. He therefore conceptualized what a better relationship should be like.

L: “He has to take time for me to listen to me, spend time for me....He did for me what a father [biological father] was supposed to do, like, be with me.”

To enhance his relationship with his stepfather from his side, he repeatedly said: “I just need to talk to him...trust him...I just have to talk to him. ” It cannot be said that his view of his stepfather was always negative.

- ***A lens to see the stepfather***

In a casual chat with Light's older brother (17 years old), I gained a lens through which to see step-fatherhood. Through his opinion I have a clue to conceptualize step-parenthood. In our conversation, he was worried about his brother's mindset regarding their stepfather and he said: "He has to see our father [stepfather] through his heart [stepfather's] towards us, not in terms of blood...Our blood father has done nothing for us, but he [our stepfather] has done a lot for him, I don't understand why he doesn't like our father [stepfather]." The significant phrase here is "through his heart". In other words, I interpreted, "through his heart" to mean "through a deed in love". There, I asked him again: "You mean he sacrificially does something for you guys?" He said: "Yes, indeed, he fetches us every day, gets on with my mom well...helps him much. "

I concluded that a lens to see step-parenthood can be "through his heart" and "through a deed" for stepchildren. Also, as a consequence, one's identity is dependent upon how one sees others with whatever lens one has.

3.2.1.4 *The voices of Light's peers*

As mentioned earlier, we conducted group meetings after every individual interview. In a group meeting, we invited two of our friends, depicting one another's personality with colour. The purpose of this work is collaboration as a community (Combs & Freedman 1999:27; White 1995b:60) The idea was to extend one's perspective about oneself. Sween (1999:193) comments that

personal identity is co-created in a relationship with other people, as well as one's history and culture. This work took place through friendship, in other words, teamwork in the light of servant leadership, which emphasizes mobilizing people to achieve one another's intrinsic values and gifts (Maxwell 1993:120).

- ***Green and brown***

Light's peers described him in colour as green (or lime green) and brown because he was ambivalent, between bright and dark, bright and gray; and as a good guy and a negatively influential guy. In his green, they saw him as "cool". One group member who identified him as green said, it was "because he sometimes becomes dangerous but he is cool. I remembered when a friend was not selected to be a rugby player, he just gave up his position and called him". Another guy added, regarding this kind of attitude, that, according to him, when they had a group project last term, two classmates were not involved in any group, so he dropped out of his group and then he teamed up with these two. One peer commented that she never saw his negative side, even if she knew his family situation. Another peer gave us both positive and negative information on him: "He has great talent as a leader but is sometimes dangerous when he gets angry."

3.2.1.5 Getting to the start of a new potential being

In describing him as "cool", they prompted him to look back on himself alternatively to deconstruct his current self through group work. Also, through

our various conversations, we finally got to a new avenue. To pave the new avenue, he created two pivotal works for his future. He coloured himself as a “rainbow”, which represented his ambivalent mood about his present in the first meeting, but from this moment on, it was reinterpreted as and for his future house. The other was that he made his metaphorical name “Light”.

- ***Rainbow***

Apart from the metaphoric meaning of a rainbow, Light thought that the rainbow represented colour, describing his uncertainty and his emotional antipathy towards his stepfather. He said that “because “I am not sure what to do, one side of my life is like light which is white when I am happy. Black is just there...I don't like step-dad, instead, I want to get back my real dad.” On the other hand, he said: “He [stepfather] is better than nothing.”

However, on the journey of our collaborative research, he has slowly but surely rethought his rainbow, which will be beautifully described for his future. First of all, according to him, this colour is relational with other colours and sucks in dark and bright light to create other colours. Moreover, light in this colour affects all other colours to be colourful. He wanted to be like this colour in his functioning. He wanted to influence his peers and people positively. He wanted to embrace people in need and guide them into the will of God like light lightens the way for people in the dark: “He [God] gives me talents and I must use it and He's given me a gift and... I must use it, using like towards Him so that He can lead people.” The rainbow which is no

longer affected by uncertainty and ambiguity is “God-given talents”, “self-actualization” (Browning 1991:258), future roles and his multi-selves. His future rainbow is being an architecture professor and a church minister.

- ***His future imagery, and his name, Light***

Before the last interview I was curious how he could re-capture himself and how he would summarize his told stories. In a therapeutic sense, in order to facilitate “a further practice for creating an experience of reflexivity”, I tried to thicken his emerging new story by means of his “summarizing” (Zimmerman & Dickerson 1996:108) his story as a whole, in imagining himself. Thus, I asked him to name himself, in imaginative work. He himself called “Light”.

Questioner: Light!

Light: “Actually, umm...I made my name Eagle; it flies high, can see everything, keep everything something is own but ...umm...like, brings fear, threatens something sometimes...Instead, I'd like to have the name Light, because it brings not fear, in the dark people [are] scare[d], but light shines people's way. Therefore, I am Light, like, I will shine people...I am not any more keep back and forth in dark and bright. I am so sure [of] what I have to do.”

At that moment, I wanted to know how the metaphor of Light would function in his daily routine. I wanted to know how I could help facilitate it in his milieu, as a member of his community. We sat together and made a list what it would do for him. In the list, we also delineated when, where and how this

would take place. The reason was that there is a tendency for people not to do what they claim they will. Simply put, they have a propensity to relapse.

- ***The work of Light***

We collaboratively made a question list about Light at school. Before discussing our list of questions, let me introduce his story a little more. When he shared his story, he wanted to recompense the sweetness of his mother in that he did well in his schoolwork. However, an obstacle arose in focusing on his schoolwork, because, when he was with friends, he became a joker or a disturbance in class. On the other hand, however, when he was alone, he could handle himself easily to study well. He said: “At school, it will help me concentrate my schoolwork.” Thus, we focused on his being with friends in questioning. Does Light exist only to concentrate on schoolwork? Does Light think that he can help only himself or all his peers? Does he fit himself into a small box in terms of his capacity to help people?

In this discussion, he externalized and animated Light and conversed with Light like a real person: “Hey, Light, have you studied well done? What else have you done? Did you just claim you are my Light! Or, you are still in my imagination or you are still my real Light?”

In short, Light wanted to practise shining on people and to keep a shining from his family to the world, so, for example, one way of his shining in his family is loving his stepfather and listening to him. He said: “My mom and dad started

fighting again, I want to intervene [in] their fighting, asking them to pray and stuff.”

3.2.1.6 *Summary of Light's story*

Throughout our journey by means of storytelling, the co-researcher explored many different developmental paths of his story. In listening to him, I noted several themes that emerged congruently. He longed for intimacy with his biological father and current stepfather, and wanted to talk openly and to be listened to. In order to achieve this intimacy, he did not act passively but has actively worked towards it. The method he has chosen is “forgiving” his biological father, “just telling” his current stepfather and living as a light for his life and people in the dark. To summarize his story, I wrote the following poem for him.

<Light>

Once upon a time

Light was born.

He loved his pine tree but it was gone.

He pined the pine but never came back.

He planted the pine in his heart.

It just grew and grew in his heart but became dark.

And yet, he still pined the pine.

The pine became his pain but soon turned into his maturity.

The pine caused him to learn forgiveness.

The pine allowed him to know the value of mutual reaction.

As a result,

He became a struggler in the rainbow.

He has kept back and forth in the rainbow.

He finally goes back to who he originally was.

He proclaims: "I am Light".

"I am being a light of myself."

"I am being a light of people."

Once upon a time

3.2.2 The story of Co-researcher Two

Dripping⁴: "I am in Grade Nine. Most of my schoolteachers said I am a good student. I love to love, philosophizing, drawing, chatting and listening to my friends. I have three stepsiblings who do not live with me. They are living with my biological father."

3.2.2.1 Overview of a love story

There was a love which was both intricate and beautiful. By its hands I was born

⁴ Dripping is name my second co-researcher chose for herself.

in 1990. I did not and could not see whether it delivered me, because as a neonate I was too immature. One day the love approached me in a very strange way in which my parents got divorced when I was still very young, two years old, too young to understand its way. “I don’t really know much about it because I wasn’t old enough to understand.”

The love changed its face to the face of remarriage. The love gave an opportunity to my dad, a composer, singer, to find this face so that he got remarried when I was about three years old, while my mom was still single. She carried on her life for thirteen years. Of course, she went on dates, but she would not get married if “I didn’t like the person”. She has had to work very hard as a businesswoman to support me and to maintain her life without the subsidy of her ex-husband. As a consequence, I have often stayed with my grandparents on my mom’s side, whose bosom was very cozy, and sometimes visiting my biological dad.

Because of the change, a bit of salt (the narrator described her experience as “the salty”) gradually overwhelmed my life in part. This was a moment to change its face again. She, my stepmom, living with my dad was fine when she first got married to my dad, but after delivering her first child, she became nasty, cold towards me although I have never had a problem with her own children whom I have a good relationship with and we enjoyed one another’s company. In that situation, I was still too young to cope with it and to know what to do. Thanks to that, I compulsorily learned love could be salty. I do not know why she is cold to

me, even though I have not lived with them. I have just visited them irregularly and I like my stepsisters and have a good relationship with all of them. Only one reason comes to me, and that is that she interpreted in a way that her husband gave more attention to me than to her and her own children, my stepsisters. That was her misinterpretation, I think. Without any discrimination between my stepsiblings and me, her husband, who is also my dad, just enjoyed writing songs and singing with us together.

The love taught me the taste of salt which consists not only of the bad but also of good ingredients. “Probably because salty can be good or bad. It sometimes...if it’s too salty then you don’t like it, but salty can be nice. People like salty, they like the taste of salt, so it’s good with some things....it’s bad with some things sometimes.” For instance, my mom eventually got married to a very fine man whom I like as well...during the last Christmas season. The love approached her first and then me next as good saltiness. I can taste it in a good saltiness that “I can share with him many things...my desire, feeling, anger, agony, problems, something like that. He listens to my story and is a good mentor. I get on well with my stepdad.” I feel comfortable enough to share with him. He really helps me with a lot of stuff, such as giving advice, listening, chatting and sharing in an honest way. On the other had, I do not share as much of what I feel with my mom and biological dad as I consult on my problems with my stepdad.

My stepfather experienced the bad saltiness. His ex-wife died of illness. When

she passed away, she left her own two children whom he really loved and got so attached to. However, because of the fact that he was their stepfather, he could not keep them in his bosom, even though they were living with him for quite a long time. The law and the biological father took them away from him. “He knows what pain life gives you.” I think through his salty experience he became a person embracing people in need. Through his painful experience, his bad saltiness could be changed to the good saltiness. Therefore, we need saltiness in life.

There was a love which has consistently changed its face in one way or another in my life. I am not sure it has affected me to a greater or lesser degree. However, I know that love flourishes in my life. “It can make you⁵ happy, it can make you sad. It’s part of your life...I love love” in spite of the fact that “I don’t think you can really ever know what love is”.

3.2.2.2 *The story in detail*

In Korean discourse, the English word “crisis” connotes two meanings: a crisis in itself is the critical moment which contains both a hazard and an opportunity at the same time. In a similar manner, the story of the narrator’s love story has progressed through simultaneous difficulties and developmental changes. The sum total of the images created by her was an interpretive choice. Through her storytelling, we could glean a harvest of the life of a remarried family and its adolescent. Indeed, various concepts were yielded. These concepts were

⁵ It is her habit in speaking that when she says, “you”, the “you” actually indicates herself.

constructed in our own language in the process of the research (Josselson & Lieblich 1993:xi). In addition, through her own story, we could hear indirectly another story (Roberts 1994:5). This story was about a broken-hearted remarried family, one that gave us an insight into a cause of pain in life and focused us, to rethink the distorted social discourse on remarriage. Her colour for herself was purple. She defined her “experienced experiences” as the taste “salty”, whose meaning was both good and bad at the same time.

The heading words, in bold, are our interpretation. The words in *italics* in the story are key words leading our conversations and questionings.

- ***Purple: creative and combinational***

In a way, she does not like the colour purple much, but she does like its characteristics. She sees purple as both creative and combinational. Consequently, she chose the colour purple in that it represents her character and what kind of a person she wants to be. At first she hesitated about where to start her storytelling. Her deliberation on a starting point for her storytelling was resolved by colouring her identity. Because she told her story in an achronological way, she went back and forth and up and down. I changed the order of her told story to give the reader a clearer sense of the events.

Dripping: “Ok, umm... where must I start from?...*(smile)*...Umm...*(time flowed)*.”

Q: Ok, let me begin in this way. If you had to describe yourself as a colour,

what colour do you see yourself as?

D: “I would see myself as...I’m don’t like...I’m not crazy about the colour purple, but if I had to refer to myself as a colour, it would be purple.”

Q: Oh, you’d be purple?

D: “Uh-huh. I don’t really like the colour, but I don’t know... I don’t like to wear purple, nothing in my room is purple...Umm... but I’m purple.”

Q: Without any reason?

D: “Well, yeah,...no, I like it, but it is not my favorite colour but it seems to be who I am. I just see myself as the colour purple...It just may be...think purple is a creative colour, a colour that is *combining* with many other colours and a colour that can be *expressive* of anything, it can be a man’s colour, at the same time a woman’s colour. It’s actually... just a colour that explains everything...I can be combinational...It expresses my personality...I like the characteristics of purple.”

Q: Oh, you’re combinational, you’re combinational with your family members and friends...?

D: “Yeah, I am, I get on well with my sisters, I mean stepsiblings. I’m still trying to get on well with my [biological] father’s wife...she started becoming nasty, she was cold towards me. And I was small [young], so I didn’t know what to do and then when I went home I cried about it.”

● ***Relationship with her biological father’s wife, not living with her: coldness is a tree***

Q: I’m so sorry to hear that. Coldness? Tell me its characteristic or make a

name for it.

D: “Umm...Maybe I would say...no, no...yeah...[a] tree because it’s got many branches. So it can be her coldness, that’s what it branches out into, like, she can be cold towards me but it’s also many...small and always so much [so many small branches], so it goes down but still because I was small [she was one of small branches]. So it’s depending on sometimes her real [ity], it’s not me, she [is] just cold but sometimes she’s very nice.”

Q: Where did it come from?

D: Sorry, I don’t get it.

Q: I mean, the reason. You said, you did not make her cold.

● ***Coldness is a byproduct of a complicated structural relationship***

D: “Yeah, it is like this, I’m his daughter, and she is his wife, but I’m not her child, so it makes things *complicated and makes fiction* [not friction]...And then.....I think she was...it all started when they had their first child because she was more jealous that my dad was giving me attention and not to her or her newborn child, but that is her wrong interpretation...well it is never new that we didn’t like each other but we try to be nice each other.”

Q: Wait a minute, you also tried?

D: “Of course, well, I try to be as nice as possible ...I mean I never liked her...[her being nice was being polite and giving a kiss when she met her]...as um...may be well I like her some stage, she came to me, she said, she was sorry that she always nasty to me.”

3.2.2.3 *A successful story of her family as a remarried family*

- ***Relationship with her stepsisters, not living with her: the coldness did not affect her relationship with them***

On the other hand, although Dripping felt cold in relation to her father's wife, Dripping likes her children, and still gets along well with them.

D: "Yeah we've got the same type of talents. We all love-well, not all, but the eldest one...the other two are still a bit small [young], so they're little...We've shared our interests and have fun."

Q: You are quite purple. Aren't you?

D: (smile)

Q: Also, everyone else, you get along well with? Your mom, your stepdad?

D: "Yes, indeed, my mom and I have a good relationship."

- ***Her relationship with her stepfather, living together: building intimacy before remarriage***

Dripping did not say, "her mom married" but said we married him". The reason is as follows:

D: "And, ever since we marry him, really umm...really umm... we have ...we get on love even before marrying, I trusted him."

- ***Telling, listening and sitting on the stepfather's lap***

D: "...Told a lot of things...he just listened to me and I just talked and talked...sitting on his leg, like a little girl. I mean teenagers don't do that but I

did. He was warm towards me, he was embarrassing [when I sat on his lap]...I enjoy spending time with xxx. He really helps me with a lot of stuff. He gives me good advice 'cause he's very wise."

Q: You feel comfortable enough to share with him?

D: "*I share more stuff with him* than what I do with my mom 'cause *he listens* to me so I can talk but I can't do to my mom...She might not understand 'cause her parents were very over-protective...And now when I do something wrong, and I feel bad about it, I don't wanna tell my mom 'cause she won't understand. She won't, can't understand why...she'll just tell me to get over it. But xxx will *try to talk it through with me and find out the reason behind the reason.*"

- ***Getting married not only to my mom but also to me***

D: "When he got married to my mom, he bought an engagement ring for me as well and gave me it on the wedding day because he said that he's getting married to my mom, but also getting married to me as well...it's like another wife."

- ***Giving chocolate on Father's Day***

"And I made a little card and gave him chocolate to say 'happy father's day'. Actually, he is not my father but I still do that. He really felt as if...um I tell him, like, 'happy father's day' even if you won't marry...and he started crying...he cried so much about me."

- ***The marital law gave him pain: the custodial issue of children of remarriage under the law***

Coincidentally, I am aware of the poisonous fixed law of remarriage and that so much of it is painful in that the law takes stepchildren from the stepparents who do not have a right to custody. I knew through literature that the law is harsh to them, but I had not heard of or experienced such a case. In listening to my co-researcher's story, however, I experienced the case indirectly (Roberts 1994:5).

D: "He's really nice. He never had his own children. His wife died, so he wasn't divorced. She left her two children who were not his own. He got so attached to them and then the mother [his wife] had died, her ex-husband, the boys' father took the boys away from him. And then he was totally broken. For two years...he was so depressed...he knows what pain life gives you, and he's experienced a lot of stuff."

Q: You said, you have a good relationship with your mom. Could you tell me more about it?

- ***Her relationship with her biological mother: accepting a new life by doing what she wants to do***

D: "We're like, because we have lived together for so long, I was just near her till [I became a] teenager. We sleep together, not because I am scared, but because [we] want to be together. Like *friends*...We enjoyed bath [ing] together until my mom got married, we could be just messy, no one care, we were *very casual, comfortable, knotty style*, but after she got married, we

changed our life style because we have xxx [her stepfather's name] as well, she changed a lot.....she has to give attention to xxx. I don't mind, it doesn't bother me at all. *I am on my own ways. I like what I am doing*, like, to store or something so now we little bit space out...yeah."

Q: That's it?

D: "Well..umm..."

- ***Her biological mother did not decide to marry a person whom she did not like***

D: "She [her mom] was alone for thirteen years. Well, she had dates but she wouldn't get married *if I didn't like the person.*"

Q: Your mom didn't want to get married to the persons you didn't like? You got to know her other dates?

D: "No, she would never...I got to know them, she would *introduce* them to me, and *ask* me what I think about them...she was dating with xxx, and, for 2 to 3 years...and they got married but I love my stepdad" [it was the first time that she called him her stepdad].

- ***The family's happiness depends on you: It depends on the situation, interpretation, good communication, trust and love (not money)***

Q: So you get on well with most of the people around you, especially with your families. So you are happy?

D: Yes, indeed, I am happy. We got on very well, my family circumstances at the moment aren't bad at all. I don't *think* I've ever really been in a bad

situation, as a result of the divorce, because my mom and dad got divorced *when I was two years*, so *it doesn't affect me so...* I mean, it affects me, probably...but not so much...as it's affected someone if they're older and their parents divorce because then *they're conscious* about it, then they would know what's happening."

Q: Then can I say that happiness or a bad family circumstance is dependent upon your situation, like the age stage, or how you choose to view it?

- ***The past is salty: it is good and bad***

D: "Yes, indeed, for instance, I would say...my past is salty..."

Q: Salty?

D: "Probably because *salty can be good and bad*. It sometimes... if it's too salty then you don't like it, but salty can be nice. People like salty, they like the taste of salt, so it's good with some things, it's bad with other things."

Q: It's a good balance.

D: Yeah, it's a balance, you [I] have your [my] ups and downs, but you're *not unhappy*."

- ***Good communication: involving patience and love***

From this moment, she interpreted a cause of her biological parents' divorce and presented her view on good communication and genuine love.

Q: How can I make it balance?

D: "You can *communicate* with yourself, you can communicate with parents

in honest...If you do that you're just gonna sort things out...But, I think they didn't have *patience* with each other, and they just thought that they couldn't carry on. But I think if their love was a *strong love*, then it could have worked."

Q: You mentioned "they" who are "they"?

D: "Hoho...sorry, my parents [biological]...There was love, but I don't think there was *patience*.....and then I think there was a large communication gap, 'cause they didn't know *how to communicate* with each other. 'Cause my dad *won't wanna say* something. I experienced the same thing with my mom like my dad, in that way, when my mom is moody or something, I can't go speak to her about something because I think she's gonna shout at me, and she probably does. But, as I said, if you do that then you're just gonna sort things out."

She emphasized the need to consider not only the mood of the parents and their inability to communicate with each other, but also that of their children. She felt that most parental communication was one-sided.

She continued to speak about happiness in relation to a good communication.

Q: Why do you think that your mom's communication with you is *one-sided*?

D: 'Cause, she had something so that I asked what happens, then she just said nothing or shouts at me, she won't wanna say, but if I was in [the] same mood like her, she was irritating me, she *had to know* what happened with me."

Q: Hehe...like me, I do too...You emphasized good communication.

D: "Yes, indeed."

Q: You know I really want to be patient in my family and workplace but sometimes I can't. What is patience in your experience?

- ***Patience: It is recognition, decision, and responsibility, what we do for others***

D: "It is easy to say 'be patient' but I think being patient means to *recognize a person's need* and you must adapt to his need, but he also adapts [to] your need. Then that is fair obviously....Then they come to a conclusion of being patient together. You should be patient because love is patient."

Q: If it does not work?

D: "Well, I can tell someone who can help toloveit is *their decision*... After that, you should be reminded of your *responsibility*. It is your determination, your decision you made...you choose....*experience that is you've chosen*."

- ***Genuine love and puppy love (high-school love): patience, responsibility, getting to know each other***

Q: You love love?

D: "I love love...without it...Love is everything, it is dangerous, it is sweet, beautiful. Love can hurt you. It breaks your heart."

Q: Dangerous, hurt, break...??

D: "If someone tells you they love you and they wanna have sex with you or

something. That is dangerous in a way, or...I mean...I think people misuse love....I remember I think many times you love him, but you don't actually know what love is. I don't know. Love is something that we all think we experience, but I don't think we really know what love is. ...there is just teenage *puppy-love* or just lust...or ..anyways I love love. It can make you happy, it can make you sad...but it's part of life...Like my mom and dad, I think there was love in their relationship but they had no *responsibility*...I mean *patience*...if you really love someone, then why you divorce, you should be able to stay with them for the rest of your life...there is love when you get married but there is no *patience*. *Be patient*. When you think you love him, and yet decide on getting married, you have to have *responsibility* for your partner...I mean both of them...making *strong love is to get to know each other better*. Without it your love is *high-school love*.”

At one time, she revealed her thoughts about the value of relationships when she described her past as being salty:

D: “*The good type of salty is having relationship* with people. People, I think, they sort of keep you sane. They keep you ‘here’, right now, they keep you going.”

Also, with her concept of a cozy house, we could analyse superiority in relationships with people.

D: “I’ll not buy a big house as I live ...I’ll buy a small and cozy house, ‘cause

then you can see your partner the whole time. When I buy it, it must be cozy and the location is very important because I want to live in an area where they are people that can live with me...in the area people that *you can communicate* with them.”

- ***Trust is an element of good communication, happiness and a good relationship***

D: “I think you *should be able to love and trust* each other so much that *you can tell each other things*. Then you can rely on that person so much. And I’m not talking about your husband or boyfriend, I’m talking about your mother or your father, whoever you have a relationship with. You must be able to tell them everything ‘cause sometimes you *can’t tell someone something and then you know that there’s something wrong*. You know that person doesn’t ...you don’t have a *good enough relationship* for them to be able to share that with you. Then you can be happy...There’s one of my friends that I trust very much ‘cause she’s also been through hard...she was raped. And she also has got a lot of stuff she hasn’t told people. We have a *close relationship* that I tell her a lot of stuff. But I trust xxx as well, but I wouldn’t talk to anybody in my family so much as I talk to xxx ‘cause they tend to tell it to another family [members], just for when they talk....not to make me bad, don’t do it purposely.”

Q: Trust is definitely something you value?

D: “Yes, indeed, not that I tell my mom everything, ‘cause sometimes I don’t

think she's gonna like what I tell her..... She'll speak a lot to my maid....or tell my grandmother. When my granny hears something, she tells the whole family, and then I'm scared that the family might think *something bad of me*. So I don't share really like sharing. Not my problems, but *my frustrations*, 'cause I get frustrated easily with stuff that doesn't work, or whatever if something's stuck in my head..."

- ***Categorizing teenagers is problematic: restricting self-esteem, creativity and relationships: keep yourself who you are***

Q: So you are worried about what other people think about you; how others view you?

D: "In a way, meaning that they think I am rebellious...I don't like it when someone puts you in a category like 'you're a nerd, or you're popular'. I'm not a nerd or something. I like to associate with everyone 'cause everyone is different and everyone should be who they wanna be. And if someone puts you into a category, they don't have self-esteem, 'cause self-esteem is low, therefore they put you lower than they are 'cause they don't want to be seen as low. So I don't like to put people into a category. If you categorize someone, then they can't be creative and active, then you affect their relationship with other people...It restricts my thinking, I just care about what my family thinks of me. But I don't mind what the public thinks, what people at school think. *I don't worry about that 'cause they're not really relevant to my life. I try to keep a good image not being bad, I'll be myself, I mustn't, I don't want to try and fit in if I don't. If I just be myself, then I fit in 'cause*

everyone accepts you.”

Q: Sorry! I don't get it by your saying 'fit in'?

D: “It doesn't matter what people say about me because I am who I am, then I can become really who I am....I believe I am one, it's me, me in this world. I am more important in the problem.”

Q: Your saying seems to say that you ignore other people's eyes on your deeds in spite of your misbehaviour.

D: “Nooo...It's just what they say about me, even though I don't do wrong, of course, in my view.”

Q: Then, let me put it in this way, you are not so frustrated by other people's evaluation on your work. Is that right?

D: “Yeah, I mean, I like what I want to do and to be, but I don't go along sidetrack.”

● ***To overcome frustration: let it flow by itself, drawing and writing a dairy***

In this conversation, my assistant interviewing her has the same interest in drawing. I cut out some of this conversation due to limited space:

Q: Let me go back to the matter of your frustration. When do you usually feel frustrated? How do you get over it?

D: “For instance, people, like, mom or anyone tells me something...and then I'll just... they don't quite understand me then I'll just go and sit, lying on ...yeah... and then drawing something [she likes drawing] or writing something in my dairy... forget them...I leave people, forget about it and

then let flow by themselves...then [it] doesn't bother me any more.”

Q: Do you paint realistically or...?

D: “I can draw realistically, or I can draw cartoons. Whatever mood I'm in. Sometimes I feel like sketching someone...”

Q: What subject do you find yourself drawing the most?

D: I definitely draw people the most, like young people and *their love*...I use symbols to express *love*.”

3.2.2.4 *The voices of Dripping's peers*

In a mood of a reciprocal assistance, her invited peers propped her up exuberantly, sharing her identities in the imaginative work. Through this group work, she was confirmed as a person who valued the priority of her relationships with others, someone who practises good communication in her daily routine and tries not to be swept away by others' judgments or evaluations of her. This confirmation shows her story of consistency and relevance.

(Bright) Red: A friend said, “Her colour is the colour of love. That's why she is red.”

.....(Other friends, shouting and laughing)

Q: Why? Do you love her? That's why she is red?

.....(Shouting and laughing again)

The speaker (laughing): “Because... you can talk to her umm... whatever... and then she responds and then you can get comfort.... She is very sensitive, like feminine, she can [be], like...like, [a] consulter”

Another peer: “Yeah, she is bright red...not dark red...because she is ‘standable’, not much changeable...just there...outstanding with others...I mean we can see her easily.... One’s personality and outlook depends on who you meet, and depends on the situation like school, what school do you go...something like that, but she is always the same... she keeps to herself but she also helps her friends.”

Q: So can I say, she is a relationship-oriented and love-oriented person?

The peer: “Absolutely”

To assist the reader, let me share an anecdote with regard to her attitude towards people in need. One day when we had lunch at a McDonalds, I saw her red eyes. I soon realized that she was glancing at a girl who was physically disabled.

The narrator of the love story responded to her friends’ description about her. “ I will not be and I don’t want to be so feminine... but I do try to be close to other people but through an emotional stance....I care about other people, I want to experience what their pain is, listen to it, and try my best.”

3.2.2.5 *Getting to the start of a new potential being, Dripping.*

In her imaginative work, she envisioned her future image as the metaphor of “dripping”, so we, all the participants in this project, called her “Dripping” instead of her actual name. This, her new name, connoted her future being and doing in

accordance with relationships with other people. The following is her actual voice.

“Dripping for the future”

“I want to expand my horizons, limits and cross my borders.

Step out of my comfort zone and drip into a large dam.

I want to go into a field of art and graphic stuff.

The paint drips.

My mind drips with creativity.

The water drips and flows from the same source [herself: I am who I am] to the same source; my thoughts, ideas drip and flow from the same source (my mind: who I am) to the same source (my physical doing: what I am doing)”

3.2.2.6 Summary of Dripping’s story

In Dripping’s storytelling, I sensed that the characteristic or nature of interviewing her was richer research ground than that of “Light”. Her story provided some facets of the life of a remarried family and the way in which the painful experience of parental divorce was dependent upon her interpretation of it and the life of being in the remarried family as seen by her as well. To put it plainly, one’s experience, whether it is “good” or “bad salty”, is one’s own choice.

Through her telling her story, she has given voice to her ideas, telling parents that they have to listen to their children’s voices in advance. She sometimes

distrusted the adults' attitude in communication, in that they tended to shout or try to give advice without listening to the child in depth. She emphasized good communication which could render possible genuine love, and forming good relationships. Overall, she spontaneously summed up her love story with her poetic words:

I love love

“Love is pain, love is sweet, kind, dangerous, and sad.

Love is everything.

It breaks your heart, makes you cry, expresses something.”

“Pain is good because pain is a form of love.

because pain is a form of impetus for being mature.

[It] doesn't matter what happens.

[It] doesn't matter which people are with you.

Either way you try to make it possible and turn it into love.”

“Who I am I gonna learn something out of this,
going to make me stronger person.”

“It adds to experience.

I don't think you should be 'hung up' on stuff that's happened to you and hold on to it

because that makes you sad and depressed,

but I think you should turn it into something beautiful and just say[:] tough life[!]

And love is supposed to be good.”