

The role of memory in finding and making meaning in and through grief.

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FOREWORD

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the following people who have joined me on this journey and made it possible:

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I would like to dedicate this dissertation in memory of Aunty Marge my spiritual mom who, along with Oom Conradie, are the two most significant and influential people in my life. I praise God for them.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the role of memory in finding and making meaning in and through grief. I use narrative ideas and introduce the Tree of Meaning metaphor as a research model, which assists people find new meaning in their lives, by experiencing, telling and re-telling stories of their lived experiences, including the grief. A qualitative approach was used so that the focus was on co-constructing new meanings, with the co-researchers. The three co-researchers emerged as a natural part of my on-going counselling, using a purposive sampling method in which the co-researchers are selected because of their specialist knowledge. i.e. the loss of a spouse or a child through death. Each co-researcher's stories were carefully recorded using the Tree or Meaning metaphor as a vehicle for the storytelling, affording the co-researchers a safe place to tap into their inner child as they explored the stories that would assist them find and make new meanings in their lives.

Out of this research journey I concluded that memory is key to meaning-making, because through our memory, we can revise, edit and rewrite our life stories and find new strands of meaning in these stories that connect the past and the future in a way that allows us to find and make meaning of our grief.

Key Terms: Narrative, grief, memory, metaphor, meaning making, theology, Tree of Meaning, stories, re-membering, co-research.

OPSOMMING

Die Doel van hierdie verhandeling is om die rol van die geheue te ondersoek met betrekking tot hoe ons lewens betekenis vind en maak in en deur die rouproses. Ek gebruik verhalende metodes en stel voor die “Boom van Betekenis” beeldspraak voor as ‘n navorsingsmodel. Hierdie model help mense om nuwe betekenis vir hul lewens te vind en maak deur hulle rou te ervaar, daarvan te praat en om hulle lewenservarings oor te vertel, insluitend die rouproses wat hulle moes deurmaak. ‘n Gehalte benadering is gebruik sodat die fokus op medesamestelling van nuwe betekenis, saam met die medenavorsers kan plaasvind. Die drie medenavorsers het ‘n natuurlike deel geword van my voortgaande berading met die gebruik van ‘n doelgerigte toetsmetode, waarby die medenavorsers gebruik is volgens hulle spesiale ervarings, byv. Die afstaan aan die dood van ‘n vrou / man of kind. Elke medenavorser se verhaal is noukeurig opgeneem deur gebruik te maak van die “Boom van Betekenis” beeldspraak as ‘n voertuig vir die oorvertel van hul verhale. Dit het verseker dat hulle ‘n veilige metode gevind het om hulle innerlike kindwees te ondersoek en die verhale uit te lig waardeur hulle nuwe betekenis in die lewe sou kry.

Uit hierdie navorsingsgeleentheid het ek afgelei dat geheue die sleutel is om nuwe betekenis vir ons lewens te vind en maak. Dit is deur ons geheue dat ons, ons lewensverhale kan hersien, redigeer en oorskrywe en terselfdertyd nuwe afleidings kan maak, wat die verlede met die toekoms verbind. Sodoende vind ons dan ‘n hulpmiddel om beter betekenis aan die rou te gee.

CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Title

The role of memory in finding and making meaning in and through grief.

1.2 The inspiration for my research – My journey.

“Grief is the price we pay for love... a journey that must be travelled to find meaning. Along our journey the presence of our loved one becomes a memory... for ever we remember.” (Unknown)

As a full time vocational minister involved in pastoral care, I found myself drawn increasingly into a pastoral ministry with people who were bereaved through the death of a loved one. This passion grew and my ministry became more practical as I cared for and supported bereaved people.

As a minister I have the privilege of being able to care with people during one of the most difficult crises we will all face in life: the death of a loved one. This practical care has become a defining characteristic of my ministry with the bereaved.

When my late wife, passed away due to cancer the real significance of practical care became very apparent to me: in my time of need this care was not available to me.

Although the lack of practical care was painful at the time, it nevertheless taught me very valuable lessons – the most significant being the decision to embark on my journey to *care with* bereaved people in different ways.

This journey was different from the traditional psychological, therapeutic and pastoral care models to which I had been exposed both as a minister and as one journeying with grief. In this journey one of the positional changes that have been very helpful is the shift from *caring for* to *caring with*. This positional change was influenced by Dirk Kotzé 's suggestion that “a commitment to do pastoral care as participatory ethical care immediately challenges us not to care *for*, but care *with* people who are in need of care” (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7).

Over the past three years this ministry with bereaved people has grown. As I opened myself to narrative ideas, I have developed a different approach to life, to ministry and to counselling.

My exposure to narrative ideas has been a major defining moment in my life both as a therapist and as a minister. I would like to take this opportunity to honour the ongoing work and influence in my life of Elize Morkel and Nicki Spies.

Through their companionship and guidance, I have used these narrative ideas to transform both my practice and my way of being in the world.

Often when I was caring with someone who had lost a loved one, I felt voiceless. I had an internal battle and an overwhelming sense of hopelessness as I struggled with memories of trying to make meaning of my own shattered world without my wife. The “voices” of grief therapists - including my own - were saying “forget”, “move on”, “let go”, “recover” and “find closure.”

I remember on numerous occasions sitting in my study and reflecting on the grief process: Surely there must be other ways of caring with our clients?

Surely there must be other ways of walking with a client through bereavement?

During this time of wrestling I was introduced to the work of two therapists - Robert Neimeyer and Lorraine Hedkte - whose work has influenced me profoundly.

Robert Neimeyer suggests that:

For most of the 20th century, bereavement was understood in quintessential “modern” terms, as a process of “letting go” of one's attachments to the deceased person, “moving on” with one's life, and gradually “recovering” from the depression occasioned by the loss, so as to promote a return to “normal” behaviour.

As the professional and lay literature on loss grew in the past 50 years, this modern conceptualisation of grief was gradually expanded to detail the symptomatic manifestations of both “complicated” and “uncomplicated” bereavement and the presumed stages through which it would be “resolved”. The latter focus on seemingly universal phases or tasks associated with the recovery proved especially popular, offering an apparent authoritative roadmap through the turbulent emotional terrain associated with acute loss and grief.

As a consequence it was embraced by generations of bereaved people and their Caregivers as the preferred framework for understanding grief and facilitating its resolution.

(Neimeyer 2002:2)

In a paper entitled '*Dancing with Death*' Lorraine Hedkte shares her belief that:

... When a person dies, a relationship does not die. When we experience death not as finality but as an invitation to a new relationship with our dying loved one, we are breaking from a modernist approach that dictates we must "get over" our grief and "move on" in life.

In spite of what we are taught about how a bereaved person should behave and grieve, "letting go" may even be a harmful pathway. (Hedkte, 2000:4)

Hedke's approach differs markedly from, the more traditional psychological models that most of us were trained to practise. These tend to move both caregivers and clients towards an assumption that if we face our pain and cope with our emotions, we will then gain closure and move forward to a place adjusted to life without our loved one.

Lorraine Hedkte's work sharply critiques this "rigid trajectory of grief":

... [T]he bereavement field has traditionally focused our attention on what has been lost and has delineated stages and tasks to describe how grief should manifest. This has guided clinicians, therapist, clergy and lay thinking as well, to think about clients as living within a rigid trajectory of grief.

(Hedkte, 2001:6)

As a minister, most of my training in the arena of grief counselling was informed by Kubler Ross's work on the "five stages of loss" and Worden's "tasks of grief".

I believe that Kubler Ross's work has been misunderstood. I would like to honour her work by suggesting that she intended the five stages of grief to be used as descriptors of the dying person's process – and thus as a hopeful invitation to dialogue - rather than what it has eventually grown into: a prescription for grief and an authoritative roadmap for the grief trajectory.

During my research I discovered a delightful book entitled "*On Grief and Grieving. Finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of Loss*", which Elizabeth Kubler Ross co-authored with David Kesler, just before her death in 2004. She writes:

The five stages of grief – denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance – are part of a framework that makes up our learning to live with the one we lost. But they are not stops on some linear timeline in grief.

(Kubler - Ross 2005: 7)

This certainly reflects a change from my understanding of Kubler Ross's grief theory. Neimeyer reminds us that:

Scientific studies have failed to support any discernible sequence of emotional phases of adaptation to loss or to identify any clear endpoint to grieving that would designate the state of "recovery".

Neither is it clear that the universal or normative pattern of grieving exists that would justify the confident diagnosis of symptomatic deviations from this template as "disordered or pathological."

(Neimeyer 2002:2)

As I reflected on these “discourses” of traditional grief theory, I realized that my source of discontent and concern lay in the staging and pathologising grief into neat little boxes. Instead of helping, this practice often disempowers the bereaved and prevents them from coming to a place where they can journey with grief and find and make new meaning in life again.

A second source of discontent arose from the very Biblicist approaches that I had been exposed to in my pastoral training.

When I use the term “Biblicist approach”, I refer to an approach which is based on *Sola Scripture* - only the Bible - but it used in a very legalistic, judgemental and non-negotiable manner.

King (1990:448) defines a Biblicist approach as “fundamentalist pastoral care” which is the “literalistic and legalistic use of the Bible as an authoritative pastoral resource for interpreting, diagnosing, and responding to human problems and crises” (Spies 2011:9).

At this point of my journey, I had more questions than answers. But as I continued reading and immersing myself in Narrative ways of thinking, the following ideas started answering some of my questions:

In *Meaning Reconstruction and the experience of Loss*, Niemeier challenges us firstly, to understand grieving as a process of meaning reconstruction in the wake of loss and then to ask ourselves the question: How might we conduct grief therapy in a way that fosters this process? (Neimeier 2002:264).

This was a defining moment in my reflection: *How would I conduct grief therapy in a way that fosters the process of meaning-making?*

I discovered several wise guides to help me navigate my way on this new journey. For instance, Neimeyer drew my attention to the importance of language and story in the grief journey. He suggested that “language and narrative configures our experience and the extent to which our most intimate sense of self is rooted and uprooted in our shifting relationships with others” (Neimeyer 2002:264).

Michael White also emphasises the importance of language in making meaning of our lives:

...an understanding developed that all meanings are linguistic and people give meaning to the experiences of life and death by taking these experiences into frames that render them intelligible.

(White 2007: 80)

Existential theorist, Victor Frankl (1992:58), observed that the need for meaning is a fundamental human motivational factor. Mankind comes to the conclusion that there is no reason to go on living in a world in which there is no meaning. Frankl believes that the ability of people to survive is dependent on their ability to derive meaning and purpose in or through or from their suffering.

Neimeyer (2002:263) supports Frankl's position on the importance of making meaning, and emphasises that "whatever the status of an external reality, i.e. the loss of a loved one, it's meaning for us is determined by our constructions of its significance, rather than the 'brute facts' themselves."

The mind actively structures experience according to its own principles and procedures. Bruner (1986:12) suggests that narrative or storytelling represents one such powerful ordering scheme

Our re-membering (memory) allows us to access these ordering schemes or systems in our mind and, through our storytelling, enables us to make the space to construct new meanings from our shattered world. Within this context, I believe that we find, make and construct meaning by trafficking in stories about our own lives. These stories include the stories of our loss as well as other people's stories of their loss. Within these re-memberings and retellings we find the space and agency to explore alternative stories, and thus to find and make new meanings of our lives.

According to McCall (2004:213), our therapeutic approach should be aimed at helping the bereaved person to "remember well all that there is to remember." In order to complete this "remembering well", she says that the person must "explore all avenues of memory, experience, thoughts, feelings, and spirit" (McCall 2004:214).

Niemeyer (2002:47) also stresses the importance of memory:

When we think of those who have died in our lives, we notice how an ongoing relationship with them in memory takes place alongside our other relationships. Their legacy in memory consists of their lifetimes, remembered moments, episodes, periods, and stories, none of which is cancelled by death.... [We] can make meaning through deepening these memories and allowing them to permeate the fabric of our daily lives and the next chapter of our life narrative.

Re - membering practices are a narrative approach to death and bereavement which emphasise the ongoing story of relationship.

Drawing on practices of storytelling, narrative legacy and rituals, these practices aim to keep relationships alive. In the flexibility of stories, relationships can even develop new qualities and enhanced dimensions following death.

From this perspective, grief becomes an evolving and creative opportunity for rich story development and change, rather than an unpleasant task to be worked through grief as quickly possible (Hedtke 2002: 3).

As I reflected on the journey I was on regarding meaning-making and re-membering, especially in light of my concerns with the therapeutic models I have been using, I was challenged to look at what role memory (re-membering) had in finding and making meaning in and through grief.

This challenge eventually formed the title and embodied the research covered in this dissertation.

1.3 Aims and commitment to the research

When I embarked on this journey, my aim was that the research would be of value primarily to my co-researchers: people who are desperately trying to make meaning of their shattered lives, due to the loss of a loved one.

My hope is that the results of the research would also be of value to therapists, ministers and others who work with people who have lost loved ones through death.

I agree with Kotzé and Kotzé's (2001:9) concern that we can allow our research to become an intellectual activity to gain yet another degree based on the suffering of others. I was challenged further by Dixon's warning (1999: 45) that "only if the participants benefit from the research will it contribute to ethically acceptable knowledge."

From the outset I have focused on my co-researchers needs. This focus has been facilitated by the fact that the basis of my research model is transformative and therapeutic, and not a data collection model.

Within my commitment to the research and my co-researchers, I want to always position myself so that our therapeutic relationship is transformative. For Walsh (1990:135). "transformative mutual transformation occurs when one feels others pain and acknowledges one's own pain and finds joy in listening to others and together we find new meanings."

My hope, and indeed my prayer, is that as we journey as co-researchers, we will not only find, but also make new meaning of our shattered lives and also benefit one another on our journey through grief.

I remain aware that in qualitative research the research aims and purpose can change during the research process, and as a researcher I want to remain open to this possibility.

As I journey in my research using the “Tree of Meaning” metaphor I believe this research model affords my co-researchers and I the openness for “new, unexpected and interesting events and stories to be revealed (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:416).

As I read, participate with my co-researchers in the “Tree of Meaning exercises” and develop my dissertation, I realise the effect of this journey on me as a researcher. The more I learn, the more I am able to put this into practice as a pastoral therapist. As I journey personally with my own grief, I see the therapeutic value and potential it opens up for me to work differently with my clients. This to me is much more than just research; it is a journey of discovery, with academic and therapeutic potential.

My hope is that when this research is complete, it will not merely lie in a University library, collecting dust. My hope is rather that it will make a contribution to the field of practical theology and pastoral care, as it opens up new understandings of how we can assist people in finding and making meaning of their grief, as they journey with their memories.

1.4 Glossary of terms

Grief is defined as the internal part of loss, how we feel, the internal work of grief, which is a process, a journey.

I resonate with Attig's definition (2002:33) of grief as the "relearning our shattered worlds, and the simultaneous finding and making meaning on many levels." I will develop this "relearning of our worlds" in the chapter five on meaning-making.

Mourning is understood traditionally as the external part of loss: this process encompasses the actions we take, including the rituals and customs.

I find Niemeyer's definition of mourning far more helpful: the focus is on the transformation of meanings and the reorganisation of one's self in relation to the other.

Mourning refers to the varied and diverse psychological responses to the loss of an important other. Mourning thus involves the transformation of meanings in relation to the other:

The goal of which is to permit one's survival without the other while at the same time ensuring a continuing experience of relationship with the deceased. An important aspect of mourning is the experience of disruption in self-organization due to the loss of the function of the relationship with the other in sustaining self-experience.

Thus mourning involves a reorganization of the survivor's sense of self is a key function of the process.

(Neimeyer 2002:24)

Tree of Meaning

The Tree of Meaning model has been adapted from the Tree of Life work developed by Ncazelo Ncube (Ncube 2006:22) and offers therapists an alternative to the more traditional modalities in loss therapy.

The metaphors used in the Tree of Meaning are also different in that they always ask question around meaning making, encouraging rich story development in dual Landscapes of action and the Landscape of identity (White 2008:84). These metaphors are discussed in more detail chapter 2.

Spiritual gifts

I use this term in the context of the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in 2 Cor 12: 1 – 31. These gifts of the Spirit are special abilities provided by the Holy Spirit to Christians for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. The list of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 12:8-10 includes wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues. Similar lists appear in Eph 4:7-13 and Rm 12:3-8.

The gifts of the Spirit are simply God enabling believers to do what He has called them to do:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

(2 Pt 1: 3 NIV)

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are part of the "everything we need" to fulfil His purposes for our lives.

I have incorporated the spiritual gifts into the Trunk of the Tree of Meaning metaphor. Hopefully, this will assist people who are in relationship with Jesus Christ to tap into their spiritual resources; it will also enable them to draw on their relationship with others, especially those in their "club of life", in a way that will assist them in their meaning-making journey.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Practical Theology and Pastoral Care

I found the following comment very helpful regarding Practical Theology:

Practical theology is a form of theological reflection in which the pastoral experience serves as a context for the critical development of basic theological understanding... here pastoral theology is not a theology of or about pastoral care, but a type of contextual theology, a way of doing theology pastorally.

(Hunter 1990: 876)

Woodward and Pattison (2000:12) state that practical theological activity usually “starts with some sort of theoretical or practical concern that seems to demand attention.” In my case, it was the concern that in grief therapy – that process of trying to make meaning once again after experiencing the loss of a loved one through death - much of the focus was on forgetting and letting go, instead of remembering.

Woodward & Pattison (2000:12) continue:

[W]henver the practical theological consideration of illness,(grief) in the context of this research and healing starts, whether with theological principles or contemporary experiences, the aim is to understand better what is going on, with a view to knowing how best to respond to the issue or situation.

Engaging with issues like illness, health, grief etc. may also lead to some changes in theological insights and concepts, and in how these are understood and interpreted.

Thus, a process of dialogue in which both theory and practice might be seen differently lies at the heart of practical theological activity.

In this research journey, conversations and narratives between theory, theology and practice emerge from the Tree of Meaning exercise in which both the researcher and co-researchers are changed.

Emmanuel Lartey discusses an approach to practical theology which he calls “The way of being and doing approach.” He describes practical theology as a form of theological engagement in which we are “*doing theology and being theologians*” (Woodward & Pattison 2000:128).

This approach towards practical theology resonates with me because the following aspects all fit well with narrative ideas:

- It asks questions about tradition, context and experience - the three elements in the practical theology equation.
- It is reflective and thoughtful.
- It is concerned about what is done in the name of faith, and in faith’s transforming nature.
- It is therefore praxis orientated.
- It asks questions about who benefits from what is done, thereby aligning itself with a feminist approach to research and therapy.

- It is a collaborative approach, which listens and creates space for many different voices.

De Gruchy et al (1994:3) cautions us as ministers about the danger of being technicians of theology rather than doers of theology. Theology is so much more than “faith seeking understanding” in a purely academic way: it is also about obedience or faithful praxis.

When these two aspects – faithful theory and faithful praxis - are brought together in sharing the Gospel in our context, then our theology, with all the critical rigor which it requires, is placed at the service of “doing theology” and thus is able to make its vital contribution to the task of the church (De Gruchy et al 1994:12).

Within the space of “doing theology” the hermeneutical and contextual aspects of theology must come into play.

Theology involves the act of interpreting, and theological interpretation is always done by a particular person, in a particular context and with a particular history.

Rossouw (1992:895) warns that “theology cannot be seen as a timeless and a closed system of theological knowledge, in which context and interpretation by the theologian play no part.”

Bosch (1992:420) reminds us that “our entire context comes into play when we interpret a biblical text.” One could therefore concede that all theology is, by its very nature, contextual.

Bosch suggests a theological position that remains hypothetical and tentative so as to facilitate an ongoing dialogue between the text and the context (Bosch 1992:426 – 427).

In my research and in my daily counselling, I am aware of remaining in this very tentative, curious position that facilitates a participatory dialogue between the co-researcher / client, the context and me.

In my aims and commitment to this research, I stated that the basis of this research was to be transformative and therapeutic. Gerkin (1991:64) defines practical theology “as the critical and constructive reflection on the life and work of Christians in all the varied contexts in which life takes place, with the intention of facilitating transformation of life in all its dimensions in accordance with the Christian Gospel.”

This is my natural position as a minister. All my co-researchers were aware of this position when we started the research together, although some of them were not attending a church at the time. This position gives the research / therapeutic relationship openness and transparency. God-talk is often part of our conversations, thus allowing agency for transformation.

I believe that using the “Tree of Meaning” metaphor as a research model has facilitated transformation theologically in all its dimensions. It has also facilitated transformation therapeutically, as we found and made new meanings in our lives.

Much of this pastoral therapy was facilitated by my focus on, and personal interest in, the rich stories and lived experience of the co-researchers. Neuger (2001:56) suggests that “Theology that is sensitive to and in dialogue with the lived experience of all people must hold central place in the work of pastoral counselling.”

Walsh (1999:3) asserts that “We are not human beings having spiritual experiences, we are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

My prayer throughout this research journey and in my ongoing pastoral care and counselling is that I would focus on the spiritual being, but also always be aware of the human experience, as shared through people’s stories – their life narratives.

2.2 Pastoral care and feminist theology

As I mentioned earlier “Theology is not a “timeless or closed system of theological knowledge, unaffected by cultural shifts” (Rossouw 1993:895).

Nevertheless, sometimes when I speak to colleagues in the ministry, it seems like we are stuck in a theological time warp.

Little space has been made for theologies – such as Liberation or Feminist theologies - that pay attention to those “from below”. In fact, there are still many circles in which feminist theology is a dirty word. How accurate is this assessment of feminist theology?

Feminist theology takes as its starting point the experiences of women and men, and their interaction with each other and with society as a source from which to do theology. From liberation theology, feminist theology learned that we cannot do theology as though we lived in some abstract realm or dead corner of history – we have to be involved in our world.

(Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:174)

I believe that it is time for ministers and the church to take a stand, to be involved in the community, to demonstrate the love of Christ to the world. “The ethical task of feminist theology is to develop our capacity for love and loving” (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:70). In the Bible the Lord Jesus Christ Himself tells us to “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your all mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’” (Mt 22:37- 39). In this context Isherwood and McEwan say that the “quest for theological reflection will no longer ask is someone a Christian, but rather is someone healthy?” (1993:86).

The Gospel narratives of our Lord Jesus Christ frequently comment that “He had compassion on them” and then He healed them at their point of need (Mt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mk 1:41; 6:34; 8:2).

The original Greek word picture for “compassion” - σπλαγχνίζομαι

- is vivid. The Greeks regarded the bowels as the seat of love and pity.

The gospel writers comment that Jesus’ bowels were moved with love and compassion or, as William Hendriksen (1975:78) suggests in the following literal translation that, “having being moved in his inner being” Jesus healed.

I believe that this position of compassion - or “doing care with people” (Kotzé 2001: 7) - is informed by feminist values. These values have guided my understanding of practical theology so that it becomes:

[T]he critical and constructive reflection on the life and work of Christians in all the varied contexts in which life takes place, with the intention of facilitating transformation of life in all its dimensions in accordance with the Christian Gospel.

(Gerkin 1991:64)

DeMarinis’ work (1993:18) on the reasons why feminist theology and psychosocial theory provide a unique resource for pastoral theology and psychology is very insightful, especially in the context of this research.

She asserts that:

- Feminist theology seeks to investigate [explore] carefully, the core beliefs, symbols, assumptions, and categories of meaning-making.
- Feminist thinking offers access to the wisdom that comes by challenging existing perceptions and disciplinary boundaries.

- Feminist theology and psychosocial theory understand belief systems and their influence to be an essential part of the way human life and relationships come to have meaning. Within a feminist framework, both theology and psychology respect the need to include religious belief and spirituality in our understanding of health and healing.
- Feminist theology incorporates a *praxis* methodology, which demands that action and reflection work together. Theory is regarded as prototype rather than archetype - it must be open to critical questioning and change.

These thoughts resonate both with where I am in ministry and in the context of the research / therapy that I am doing. The “Tree of Meaning” facilitates the “exploring” of the core of beliefs, symbols, assumptions, and categories of meaning-making that facilitate the agency my co-researchers have experienced.

I would not be wrestling with the discourses of current grief theory – such as “letting go, moving on and forgetting” - if I had just accepted the status quo and did not challenge existing perceptions and the disciplinary boundaries of theology and psychology.

I believe that it is crucial for both theology and psychology to respect the need to include religious belief and spirituality in our understanding of health and healing.

This is often not the case, to the detriment of pastoral care, counselling and psychology. For example, a colleague in ministry recently insisted that if there is good sound expository preaching in the church, there is no need for pastoral counselling. He clearly positions himself on the opposite pole from DeMarinis' feminist stance.

When one incorporates a *praxis* methodology, one is much more open to critical questioning and change. Pastoral theology then becomes “more like living water than a tablet of stone. It is something that moves and changes shape, content and appearance, like a lake over time” (Pattison in Graham 1996:56).

The dangers of churches erecting “tablets of stone” instead of being pools of life-giving water are real: “Instead of showing honest empathy, the churches are often more concerned with the ethical issues at hand. They are so busy pursuing a fundamentally good theology that they lose sight of the people that suffer” (Muller 2003: 2).

Muller continues, using Campbell (2000:1-4). Quoting from Mi 6:8 - “And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” – Campbell comments that “the order of these three demands, I realized, is important: justice, kindness, humility. In the process of seeking to do justice and love kindness, we are led to humility before God” (2000:2).

I believe that the church needs to become more compassionate in its pastoral care, including the context of caring with people who have been bereaved. In therapy I frequently hear stories of ministers who have not demonstrated compassion to people as they struggle with their grief. They prevent the coffin from being present in the funeral service or they make it obvious that – for theological reasons – they cannot condone cremation.

These and other actions or statements can prevent the bereaved from various means of remembering, thereby “othering” them according to “traditional power” models within their own pastoral discourses and the hierarchy of their church.

I resonate with Boyd’s (1996:2) suggestion that “[O]ur ultimate relatedness to God takes place in the context of radical non-pathologising grace in which God accepts us without judgment and even without a DSM-IV diagnosis. Rather, God-in-Christ participates with us in a hope-filled conversation toward salvation and wholeness.”

Since healing is a core concern of a feminist theology of praxis, I have embraced these feminist theological ideas. In my work as both a minister and a pastoral narrative therapist, I have tried to ensure that the church becomes a place where people can find healing and Christ- like love and compassion.

2.3 Using Narrative ideas

A fundamental shift in my approach to pastoral care has been as a result of my engagement with narrative ideas:

The narrative approach is not just about listening to stories and writing them down. It's more about understanding the "lived experiences" contained in the stories and the meaning they hold for the people that share them, like the co-researchers. This means turning our backs on "expert's" filters; not listening for chief complaints; not "gathering" the pertinent-to-us bits of diagnostic information interspersed in their stories; not hearing their anecdotes as matrices within which resources are embedded; not listening for surface hints about what the core problem "really" is; and not comparing the selves they portray in their stories to normative standards.

(Freedman & Coombs 1996:76)

In *What is Narrative Therapy?*, Alice Morgan describes its basic tenets:

Narrative therapy seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling and community work, which centres people as the experts in their own lives. It views problems as separate from people and assumes people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of problems in their lives.

(Morgan 2002:2)

While chronicling the history of Narrative therapy falls well outside the scope of this dissertation, I nevertheless would like to outline in broad strokes those Narrative ideas and terms that I have used during this co-research journey. More particularly, those that are not fully described in other parts of this dissertation.

Narrative metaphor

... The narrative metaphor proposes that persons live their lives by stories - that these stories are shaping of life, and that they have real, not imagined effects and that these stories provide the structure for life.

(White 1991:28)

In therapy organized by the narrative metaphor, we work with people to find new meaning in their lives, by experiencing, telling, and re-telling stories of as-yet-unstoried aspects of their lives.

(Freedman & Combs 2008:1)

Freedman & Combs use the following diagram to explain the narrative metaphor:

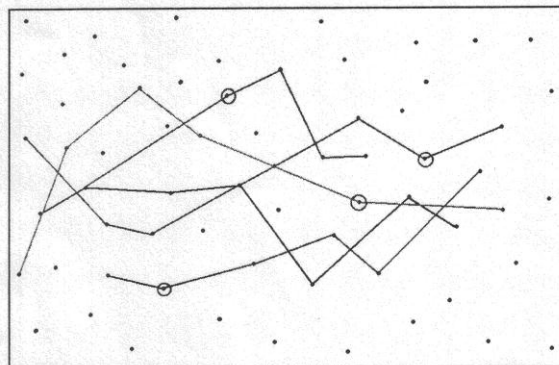


Fig 1

In the context of the narrative metaphor diagram (Fig 1), each one of these dots represents a life experience. When people come to therapy they are usually focusing on the problem saturated story, or the dominant storyline. During therapy we encourage our clients to talk about other storylines or alternate stories. This process leads to the development of multiple storylines with rich, complex meanings that speak of multiple possibilities for people's lives. This process does not take away the problem saturated

story, but these stories have a different meaning as they form part of a multi-stranded story (Freedman & Combs 2008: 3)

In my co-research and in therapy I use the narrative metaphor to explain narrative therapy ideas to the co-researchers or client. The narrative metaphor also assists me to remain curious in my listening and questioning: “Curiosity is shaped by the narrative metaphor (Freedman & Combs 2008: 4).

Michael White explains his interest in the narrative metaphor:

[narrative therapy is] founded on the assumption that people give meaning to their experiences of the events of life by taking them into frames of intelligibility, and on the conclusion that it is the structure of the narrative that provides the principle frame of intelligibility for acts of meaning-making in everyday life. The concepts of the Landscape of action and identity bring specifically to the understanding of peoples participation in meaning-making within the context of narrative frames.
(White 2007:80)

Landscape of action

The realm of human experience in which events occur and out of which we fashion the stories with which we make sense of our lives.
(Monk, Winslade, Crocket, Epston 1997:109)

The landscape of action is the ‘material’ of the story and is composed of the sequence of events that make up the plot and the underlying theme (Bruner 1986:14).

Michael White defines the landscape of action as the experience of events that are linked together in sequence through time and according to specific plots (White 2007:78).

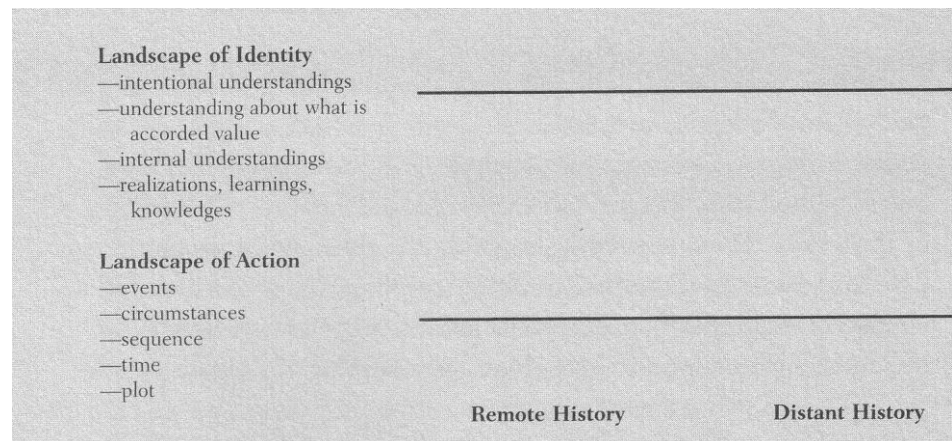
Landscape of identity

The realm of human experience in which we make meaning of the events that happen to us and develop understanding of the connections between events by reference to culturally learned discourse.

(Monk et al. 1997:109)

The Landscape of identity or consciousness is composed of what those involved in the action know, think or feel, or do not know, think or feel (Bruner 1986:14). White's definition is wider: he includes intentional understandings, understanding about what is accorded value, internal understandings, realisations, learnings and knowledges within the landscape of identity. He also provides us with a useful map to help understand the Landscape of action and identity (White 2008:84):

Fig 2



Map of Michael White's dual Landscapes

The concept of the landscape of action and identity seem relevant to the understanding of peoples' meaning-making activities in life, the construction of personal narratives and the constitution of their identities through everyday acts of life (White 2008: 80).

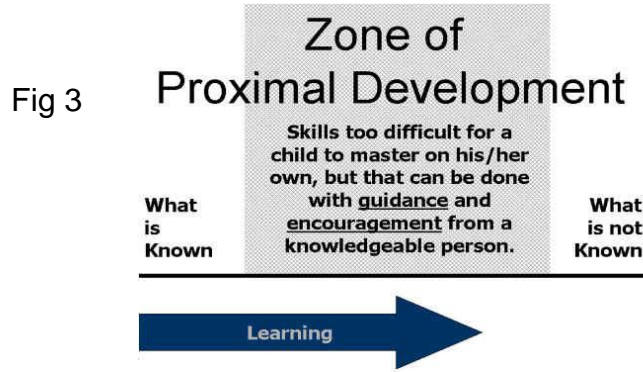
White also speaks of seeing the landscape of identity being “composed of ‘filing cabinets of the mind,’ each one representing a category of identity that is culturally relevant” (White 2008:106).

He goes on to suggest that in re-authoring conversations, like the ones that are facilitated by the Tree of Meaning metaphor, many identity conclusions that contradict the dominant storylines of our lives are entered into these “filing cabinets of the mind” allowing the client to shape new meanings and understandings (White 2008:106).

This is one of the reasons behind my development of the Tree of Meaning metaphor: it assists the co-researchers to loiter longer the landscape of identity so that they can access these “filing cabinets of the mind” and thus enabled to find new meanings as they re-member.

Scaffolding

Before we can discuss scaffolding in the context of this dissertation, we need to understand the idea of the zone of proximal development developed by a Russian psychologist, Vygotsky.



Vygotsky determined that, in the great majority of cases, development is founded upon learning, and learning is an achievement not of independent effort, but of social collaboration. The “zone of proximal development” is described as the distance between what the child can know and achieve independently and what is possible for the child to know and achieve in collaboration with others.

Traversing this zone is a significant task. It is not a task that children can achieve unless it is broken down into manageable portions. “Scaffolding” is the process of breaking a task down into manageable portions, and thereby encouraging the child to stretch his mind and to exercise his imagination in the achievement of the learning tasks (White 2008: 272).

Michael White suggests that:

[T]he gap between what is known and familiar and what might be possible for people to know about their lives can be considered a “zone of proximal development.” This zone can be traversed through conversations that and provide scaffolding, this sort of scaffolding that provides the opportunity for people to proceed across this zone in manageable steps.

This scaffolding makes it possible for people to incrementally and progressively distance from the known and familiar and more toward what it might be possible for them to know and to do.

It is in traversing this gap between the known and the familiar and what is possible that people experienced in a newfound sense of personal agency: a sense of being able to regulate one's own life, to intervene in one's life to affect its course according to one's intentions, and to do this ways that are shaped by one's knowledge of life and skills of living.

(White 2008:263-264)

I believe that when using the Tree of Meaning metaphor, scaffolding is happening all the time. As the co-researchers make new meaning, learn new skills and come to new knowledges, these allow them to move across that gap between what is known and familiar (their life before their loved one passed away) and what is possible (a life after their loved one passed away).

Co-research

This term, coined by David Epston, refers to research carried out jointly with those who experience the problem firsthand or, in the case of this dissertation, to people who have lost loved ones through death. The purposive sampling method I used to select my co-researchers proposes that co-researchers are selected because of their specialist knowledge in the context of the research. This resonates well with a Narrative approach in therapy and research in which the clients / co-researchers are seen as the experts in their lives (Kincheloe & McLaren 1993:147)

Epston articulates the thinking behind the term “co-research”:

I experienced a discomfort with practices that gazed down at those who sought their care or services and tended to redefine their patients as lower types, from a lower social order. "Co-research" is a distinctive therapeutic practice that articulates and gives equal authority and equality to insider knowledge and outsider professional knowledge.

(<http://www.unitec.ac.nz>)

I found that our participatory approach to co-research in this context is very joining and I know that the co-researchers that joined me in this journey felt honoured and respected in the process.

Discourse

A discourse is a system of words, actions, rules, beliefs, and institutions that share common values; particular discourses sustain particular worldviews.

Discourses in our society powerfully influence what gets storied and how it gets storied. They tend to be invisible and taken for granted as part of the fabric of reality. In Narrative therapy, we seek to identify the dominant discourses - those that support problem saturated stories.

The following are examples of some of the discourses evident in grief therapy:

- Grief is resolved when the bereaved person can put loss out of their mind: they just need to “let go and move on.”
- Mourning is usually over in three months and certainly within one year: time heals everything.
- Grief is resolved in a linear fashion: the mourner just has to go through the grief stages then the grief will be resolved and there will be closure.

As a therapist, one must be aware that, within the context of discourses, there are also “professional discourses”. White (1997:120) alerts us to the fact that:

[in the] culture of psychotherapy these professional discourses are characterised by classes of knowledge that feature “truth” claims about the human condition – claims that are ascribed an objective reality status and that are considered to be universal, speaking to the “facts” about the nature of life that can be discovered in all persons, regardless of culture, circumstances, place, era, and so on.

For White, the danger of these “professional discourses” lies in the way that they tend to:

... [s]hape the therapist’s performance of “truth” claims. This performance can be based on the assumption that the therapist is the all-knowing observer, one who has achieved, in regard to knowledge, an autonomous, detached, and disinterested status. The client is regarded as the object of this knowledge, and is constituted, through this interaction as “the other.”

(White 1997:120)

This “professional discourse” embodies a very different position from the participatory, not knowing, co-researcher and de-centred position that I believe one should adopt as a Narrative Therapist.

Deconstruction

In Narrative Therapy we are interested in discovering, acknowledging and taking apart (deconstructing) discourses. Deconstruction is central to Narrative Therapy. As we separate from these dominant discourses, we open up new opportunities for challenging them and entering a new and preferred story or description.

Deconstruction conversations thus assist people to take apart or “unpack” the dominant stories and to see them from a different perspective. It is important to see that the therapist is not trying to impose his/her ideas or thoughts on the client in an attempt to change the client’s thinking.

Rather, the therapist is asking questions to which he/she does not know the answer (a not-knowing position); the therapist remains curious, listening for unique outcomes. (Morgan 2000: 45-50)

Unique outcomes – also called Sparkling moments

In his last book before his untimely death, Michael White suggests that:

[T]he aspects of lived experiences that are rendered meaningful are those that we take into the known and familiar storylines of our lives. Many of these experiences are “out of phase” with the plots or themes of the dominant stories of our lives and thus are not registered or given meaning to. However, these out-of-phase experiences can be potentially significant, and in favourable circumstances they can be constituted as “unique outcomes”.

The identification of such out-of-phase aspects of lived experiences can provide a point of entry for the development of alternative storylines of people’s lives.

(White 2008:219)

Morgan (2000:51) defines “unique outcomes” as those events that stand outside of the dominant story or problem:

A unique outcome is a sparkling moment, a situation in which the problem does not feature, indicating the self-efficacy of the individual in creating solutions and not being intimidated by the problem.

(Durrant & Kowalski 1998)

Conversations or metaphors - like the Tree of Meaning - that highlight or bring “unique outcomes” to the fore, provide our clients with the opportunity to give voice to the intentions for their own lives and to develop a stronger familiarity with what they value in life (White 2008:233) and thus to find meaning.

Personal Agency

Michael White (2007:263-264) explains personal agency as:

a sense of being able to regulate one's own life, to intervene in one's life to affect its course according to one's intentions, and to do this in ways that are shaped by one's knowledge of life and skills of living.

In the context of therapy this means that we ask questions that produce a sense of agency in the client. Agency with regard to the "landscape of action" means that the client perceives their lives as a historical sequence of events in which their own decisions and actions can do something that makes a difference.

Helping clients achieve agency with respect to the "landscape of identity" means not only making a difference, but their actions can be directed intentionally toward a particular desire or value.

2.4 Qualitative approach

I have used a qualitative approach in my research. The aim of this research is not so much about data collection, but rather about co-constructing new realities and meanings in a collaborative process with my co-researchers, regarding the role of memory in finding and making meaning in grief.

The qualitative research approach allows the research to move away from scientific and mathematical measurement and statistics, to an approach where one sees the lived experiences of one's co-researchers as too rich, complex and important to be reduced to statistical analyses.

Qualitative research emphasises hearing the lived experiences of people in their contexts. It focuses on understanding, interpreting, and finding meaning, rather than predicting and generalising (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:416).

The qualitative approach also fits well within the narrative framework in which I have chosen to work. For instance:

- Meaning is given to data, not by measurement, but by interpretation (Willows & Swinton 2005: 22).
- Rich and thick descriptions of people's stories of meaning-making are emphasised (Morgan 2000: 15).
- The research is seen as a collaborative exercise of researcher and co-researchers in a participatory endeavour (Kotzé 2002:7).
- The research is seen as a reflective process, where the researcher is also impacted and transformed by the process of research and reflection.

I found this aspect especially relevant, as I have a similar context to the co-researchers in that I lost my spouse through death (Bird 2004:87)

- The researcher is not the expert, but rather does the research from a “not knowing position”. This facilitates openness and agency (White 1990: 188).

Anderson and Goolishian (1992:384) suggest that:

In the qualitative approach the “not-knowing” position allows the researcher to ask questions of the co-researchers, which are not informed by method and demand scientific answers which one sees in the quantitative approach.

2.5 **Sampling and choice of co – researchers.**

The co-researchers emerged as a natural part of my on-going pastoral care and counselling ministry within the church and the community. I have been intimately involved with each one. With many of them, I had officiated at the funeral, and had been involved with the on-going bereavement counselling and pastoral care over a period time - from months, and, in some cases, years.

My sampling was thus taken from this group and based on a theoretical approach which gathers information from a sample of the population who knows something about the research subject.

This resonates well with a Narrative approach to therapy and research in which the client / co-researcher is seen as the “experts” in their lives (Kincheloe & McLaren 1993:147).

I used the purposive sampling method in which the co-researchers are selected because of their specialist knowledge in the context of the research.

Since the research aim is to look at the role of memory in finding and making meaning in and through loss, each of the co-researchers were selected because they had lost either a spouse or a child through death.

The power of purposive sampling lies in the fact that one can select information rich cases for in-depth analysis of the central issues being studied. Purposive sampling is the best sampling method to use with small numbers of individuals or groups. These may well be sufficient for understanding human perceptions, problems, needs, behaviours and contexts, which are the main justification for a qualitative audience research (<http://www.cemca.org/books/chap13.htm>).

I chose these two types of loss – loss of spouse and loss of child - as they tend to be very complex, multi-layered bereavement journeys. As such, they pose considerable challenges for ministers.

2.6 A participatory approach

I agree with Kotzé (2002:13) when he draws a distinction between prescriptive and participatory ethics. Prescriptive ethics refer to “ethics resulting from a process of deductive reasoning grounded in a system of truth that is mostly embedded in scientific and or religious discourse” (Kotzé 2002:13); whereas participatory ethics require an “ethical consciousness situated in the participation of all, especially those who have been marginalised and silenced” (Kotzé 2002:18).

During the research journey, I noticed how one can be silenced by “grief discourses” – such as, “Christians don’t grieve like that” or “Where is your faith?” Kotzé suggests that participatory ethics involves listening *to* them, and engaging in participatory solidarity *with* them but not deciding *for* them (2002:18).

I am comfortable using a participatory approach: “participation is the key issue as far as ethics in research are concerned” (Kotzé 2002:27).

The co-researchers need to participate in the decisions about what to research; by what means the research should be conducted; what paradigm, theory or research approach should be used; what the design and process of the research journey should be; how the reflections and interpretations of the research should be co-constructed; how research reports should be written; and finally, how the research is evaluated when presented for publication or for degree purposes.

My approach both to research and to pastoral care resonates well with Kotzé and Kotzé's suggestion that: "A commitment to do pastoral care as participatory ethical care immediately challenges us not to care *for*, but care *with* people who are in need of care" (2001:7).

I regard this research dissertation as part of me "doing care *with* people". It is not just a group of people randomly selected for research. Rather, these are people who I have been caring *with*: that is, participating in their grief journey over a period of time.

Largely because of the journey we have already been on, these therapeutic relationships possess mutual trust and respect. We guard against exploitation through transparent, "taking it back exercises", as well as always seeing the co-researchers as the experts in their lives.

I resonate with Kathie Crocket's suggestion that:

Therapists must be willing to explore their own painful stories and gain a greater understanding of themselves with the help of people they trust. By doing so, they can develop confidence in their ability to respond appropriately to their co-researchers / clients most painful stories. (Monk et al. 1997: 65

In the context of this “willingness to explore their own painful stories and gain a greater understanding of themselves” I also hear Clandinin & Connelly’s caution:

...when we enter into a research relationship with participants and ask them to share their stories with us, there is the potential to shape their lived, told, relived, and retold stories as well as our own. These intensive relationships require serious consideration of who we are as researchers in the stories of participants, for when we become characters in their stories, we change their stories.

(Clandinin and Connelly in Denzin & Lincoln 1994:422)

I keep this thought in tension throughout the research journey. Because of my own grief stories, I could easily become characters in my co-researchers’ stories, and thereby change their stories.

Muller (2001:5) suggests that “to allow the stories of people and communities to be fully told, the researcher that works from a narrative perspective, has to be in a ‘not knowing position’.”

I agree with Muller, Anderson & Goolishian and White when they speak of this “not knowing position”. This meant that in all my conversations with my co-researchers, they were the experts of their own lives. In the context of this dissertation, their unique stories of grief were kept in the forefront. This “not knowing position” on the part of the researcher contributes towards “breaking down any power differences between co-researcher and co-researcher” (Reinharz, 1992:185).

Within this framework of a participatory approach, and because the concept of “meaning-making” is so central to the research, I found Botha’s (1998:82) comment very helpful: “[the researcher is not] an independent observer, but rather an independent participant within a meaning generating system”.

2.7 **Research Model**

Finding and developing a research model for my research proposal was a challenge. I wanted a research model that would not only facilitate my research aims, but also would be of value primarily to my co-researchers. Moreover, the research model would need to facilitate a safe environment for therapy as we - as co-researchers - found and made meaning together through shared lives, experiences and stories.

2.7.1 **Finding the tree**

As I reflected on the grief conversations in which I participated in therapy, I realised that frequently the problem saturated story or dominant storyline is retold over and over again.

Moreover, these problem saturated stories are usually told from the perspective of the Landscape of action: that is, the events surrounding the death of the loved one are linked in sequence through time, according to a theme or plot (White 2007: 78).

These conversations often continued for months, sometimes even years, and result in the person remaining in these problem- saturated territories of their identities. As a therapist, I found that one needs to interrupt these single storied accounts by encouraging other hopeful, life giving stories that will facilitate agency in their grief journey.

In this context, the idea of encouraging double storied accounts resonates well with the narrative metaphor, in which “we work with people to find new meaning in their lives by experiencing, telling, and re-telling stories of as-yet-un-storied aspects of their lives” (Freedman & Coombs 2008:9).

As part of my journey in Narrative Therapy training with Elize Morkel, our consultation group discussed a paper entitled “The Tree of Life Project” presented at the International Narrative Therapy Conference in Norway (Ncube 2006).

“The Tree of Life” is a psychosocial support tool based on Narrative Practices, which uses different parts of a tree as metaphors to represent the different aspects of our lives.

Metaphors, together with carefully formulated questions based on these metaphors, can be very useful in inviting people – both children and adults - to tell stories about their lives in ways that make them stronger and more hopeful about the future.

While “The Tree of Life” was not designed as a “bereavement tool”, it opens up space for conversations very effectively, and thus has been used extensively with children in different contexts to facilitate conversations about loss and bereavement.

It simultaneously opens up spaces and opportunities to tell, hear and explore stories of hope, shared values, and connections to those around them as well as to those who have died (Ncube 2006:6).

The Tree of Life metaphor gives vulnerable children a safe place to stand, a place that allows them to experience a preferred identity in order to change their relationship with the problems and the challenges that they face in their lives (Ncube 2006:11).

As a therapist, I have found this concept very helpful. People who have been traumatized or who are travelling with bereavement need a safe place to have conversations, especially as they start exploring a new preferred identity that will enable them to engage in finding and making new meanings of their shattered lives.

During the process of developing the “Tree of Life” exercise, Ncazelo Ncube became more aware of “how re-traumatizing it can be for people to simply tell and re-tell single story accounts of loss or trauma as these single-storied accounts result on people dwelling only in the problem-saturated territories of their identities” (Ncube 2006:12).

The “Tree of Life” metaphor encourages these conversations. In the process, it also encourages the development of double second stories regarding the child’s skills, abilities, hopes and dreams and the histories of these aspects. It also allows the counsellor many opportunities for rich conversations and explorations of children's second stories (Ncube 2006:13).

In our consultation group with Elize Morkel, my Narrative Therapy mentor and supervisor, we all participated in a “Tree of Life” exercise in which we explored and retold stories in our lives, in the context of the exercise.

I connected with the metaphor immediately. Not only did it open up a safe place for me to “visit my own grief”, but it also presented itself as a possible metaphor that I could use in therapy.

I contacted Ncazelo Ncube at REPSSI via e-mail. I shared with her my ideas regarding the possibility of gaining permission to modify the “Tree of life metaphor” into a “Tree of Meaning” metaphor. She responded favourably to my request, and so the reflection process continued

2.7.2 **Growing the Tree of Meaning**

The “Tree of Life” metaphor is designed to support children into explorations about the second stories of their lives - those skills, hopes and dreams they have for their lives - by first allowing them to explore the “precious things” about their lives. These “precious things” include family history, important relationships, their skills and the things they are proud of (Ncube 2006:20).

By first exploring these good and positive aspects of their lives, the children are better able to challenge the feelings of hopelessness, desperation, depression and defeat that many of them face in the context of HIV/AIDS (Ncube 2006:22).

As the “Tree of Meaning metaphor” evolved in my mind, the following aspects of the metaphor became key:

- It needed to open a safe place for clients to visit and have conversations about their grief.
- It needed to facilitate the remembering and tellings of events, places, people, relationships, dreams, achievements and challenges that make meaning in their lives.
- It would allow clients to “tap into that inner child” as they explored the rich tapestry of stories that would assist them to find and make new meanings in their lives.

- It would limit re-traumatisation, by allowing clients to experience distance between themselves and problem saturated story of their bereavement.
- It would facilitate “remembering and honouring the lost loved one”.
- It would facilitate clients reconnecting with and meeting their “Club of life” (White 1997:23).

In working with Ncube’s metaphor, I changed the metaphorical descriptions of the different parts of the tree, and added new parts to the clients’ Tree of Meaning:

ROOTS - Family history, origins, places of meaning.

SOIL - Significant events that shaped clients’ life
and which made meaning.

TRUNK - Skills, talents, spiritual gifts, training that
make meaning.

BRANCHES - Dreams, goals, things clients aspire
to do that would make meaning.

LEAVES - Significant people / relationships where
clients have found meaning.

FALLEN LEAVES - significant people client has lost. The fallen leaves become nutrients for the soil. A useful question was: How does the meaning of fallen leaves become life-giving to you and your Tree of Meaning?

FRUITS - Achievements that have made meaning in the client's life.

BUGS - Problems that client faces day-to-day. For example: What are the bugs that challenge meaning-making in your life?

I shared the idea of the Tree of Meaning with a colleague, Nicki Spies, who is also a narrative therapist. After reflecting together, I realised that this metaphor had the potential to be valuable not only in the context of my co-research, but also in therapy. This colleague also assisted me in developing the metaphor with the fallen leaves. These "fallen leaves" became a useful metaphor to enable clients to re-member and honour their deceased loved ones in a way that enriched meaning-making and was life-giving to the on-going relationship through memory with the deceased.

2.7.3 The Co - Research Process

As I mentioned in Section 2.5 (sampling and choice of co-researchers), the co-researchers joined me in the research journey as a natural part of my on-going pastoral care and counselling. I was already in a therapeutic relationship with two of the co-researchers before their loved ones past away.

I was also the one who broke the news to them that their loved one had passed away. I officiated at the memorial services, and was involved in on-going pastoral care with them for many months before I shared the idea of the Tree of Meaning with them.

During these therapeutic conversations, I shared with them the idea of the Tree of Meaning. We also spoke of my research and about the concept of co-research. Since they were the experts in their lives – especially where their grief was concerned – and since this metaphor had never been used in therapy before, they could become my co-researchers on this journey. As we “loitered under the Tree of Meaning” - territory never explored before - our journey seemed so much more meaningful and participatory.

Each co-researcher started the journey in their own time, when they felt ready. I believe that giving clients freedom to choose when to start is very important, not only in the context of co-research, but also in therapy.

I noticed that those clients who started with the “Tree of Meaning” metaphor too early in therapy frequently went back to sharing the problem saturated story – a story set within the context of the “Landscape of action”. This way of telling their stories is characteristic of the early grief period.

Without wanting to get into grief trajectories or pathologising people, I found that the people who had lost a spouse were able to loiter under the Tree of Meaning within approximately a year of their loss. In the case of those who had lost a child, this metaphor only seemed to become therapeutically meaningful after at least two years.

Once the co-researcher felt ready to start the journey we had conversations around the journey in detail. We also discussed the co-researchers’ consent form, which I gave each co-researcher to read and consider before signing and joining the co-research journey.

During this interview we also agreed on confidentiality boundaries: they could, at any time during the journey, decide if something should be kept confidential and not form part of the dissertation. I also reminded them that they were the experts in their lives: their stories of grief and other lived experiences were unique, and distinctly theirs.

I believe that because our therapeutic relationship was already of such a nature, therapy and co-research was made possible right from the start of the co-research journey.

During the second session, the co-researchers started drawing their Tree of Meaning. We used a large sheet of flip chart paper, wax crayons for the tree and Koki pens to write on the tree. Each co-researcher found this was a very unique experience, especially since they had not drawn with crayons for many years. I believe that children and adults are very comfortable and at ease with the Tree Metaphor.

Not only do we have a relationship with the natural world in general, but “trees in particular provide rich material for psychosocial and collective practices” (Denborough 2008: 95).

Beale (2007:1) comments on the:

...fond memories of a tree associated with a place, a person or a special time in their lives. In the same way a certain fragrance can take you straight back to your grandmother’s house, or a favourite sweater you once owned, or your local bakery. Nostalgia about trees evokes a more visual kind of memory.

We found this to be true in the stories that were shared under the Tree of Meaning. I will share these in Chapter 6.

During the third session each co-researcher “labelled their roots” and shared stories of their family history, origins and places of meaning. The naming or labelling consisted mainly of one word or a phrase that was a cue for the co-researcher to re-member and thus enabled them to share rich, thick stories of people and places that made meaning in their lives.

With the clients' permission I taped each session. I also made notes so that we could document the rich stories accurately - in the clients own words - and so we did not misinterpret tellings, stories and meanings. I used a lapel microphone to record the session.

This meant that the co-researchers were usually unaware that the interview was being recorded, thus minimising distraction.

After each session I transcribed the stories and then sent them to the co-researcher to review, so that at the next session we could re - author the story from the previous week.

This process facilitated on-going feedback loops which in turn assisted the co-researchers to thicken their stories and facilitate new meaning-making. Rubin and Rubin (2005:204) suggest that transcription is done as soon as possible after the interview.

If there is something unclear in the recording, you can then remember with the help of your notes, and indicate on the transcript that you have added a note you remembered.

Each week, when we re-storied the previous week's stories, the co-researcher would often thicken the story further, as they remembered more detail. They would then add more roots, soil, or branches as the remembering triggered other associated memories.

During the fourth session we “labelled their soil” and shared stories of significant events that shaped and contributed meaning in their life. The tellings and re-tellings of these stories were very rich.

We often had to allow the session to extend over two hours to allow these stories to be told. These stories were mainly situated in the Landscape of identity: full of rich, double storied accounts, they had moved away from the problem (grief) saturated storyline of Landscape of action.

In the next session we “labelled their trunk”: this facilitated tellings of their skills, talents, and training.

Denborough (2008: 78) suggests that in some contexts, asking individuals about their own skills and abilities can lead to bleak faces. This was my experience too. In our interviews, the co-researchers took a while to be able to document and talk about their skills, talents and abilities.

I believe that this is part of the discourse that we tend to grow up with: namely, that we should not be proud or “talk oneself up in front of others” (Denborough, 2008: 78).

The conversations and stories around the trunk were very significant. These enabled the co-researchers to make some meaning of their preferred identity that had been shattered through loss.

I also added the category of “spiritual gifts” to the list of their skills. This allowed conversations regarding the co-researchers’ spiritual gifts, which in turn facilitated rich stories for those co-researchers who were in relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. When suggesting the category of “spiritual gifts”, I was also very careful in the co-research process that people who were not attending church should not feel “othered”.

I believe that if one positions oneself in therapy in the de-centred position - as a co-therapist with “God- in- Christ as He participates with us in hope-filled conversation toward salvation and wholeness” (Boyd 1996:2) - then our conversations and therapy will be more open to what He is doing in our lives anyway, because He is God.

The next session enabled the co-researches to “label their branches”: to share regarding their dreams, goals, and the things they aspired to that would make meaning in their life. These conversations and stories were very hopeful: they facilitated transport to new meaning-making.

They allowed the co-researchers to dream beyond their grief and to see that life could have meaning once again – life would be different, but nonetheless meaningful.

This session enabled the co-researches to “label their leaves” and to share stories regarding significant people and relationships where they had found meaning. The leaves represented people and relationships with people – both those who are still alive and those who have passed away.

Hedkte (2003:3) suggests that this approach offers us the possibility of continued access to stories, connections, love and meaning.

This new way of thinking means that, regardless of death, a person whom we love but who has died can continue to be part of our membership club.

Hedkte (2003:1) continues:

Much of my work with people who are dying and their loved ones has been influenced by Myerhoff's (1982) concepts of re-membering and membership.

Gergen's (1994:13) work is also useful here. He suggests that the way in which narrative therapy approaches death, dying and bereavement takes this field much further.

By placing our relationships in the foreground rather than merely focusing on the life of the individual, our families, friends, colleagues and community can all participate in the authoring of the stories by which we know ourselves and by which our preferred identity is shaped. In these stories, we construct the membership of our relational world (Gergen 1994:8).

The deceased can continue to be thought of as a spouse, a parent, a child, a friend, a co-worker and a community member. As such, their "voice" continues to influence our present day choices and actions (Hedkte 2003:2).

In the re-membering conversations around the leaves, the co-researchers are invited to re-member or renew memberships to their club of life.

Michael White took up Meyerhoff's notion of membered lives and the metaphor of a "club" or "club of life." According to White (1997: 22):

...the image of membered lives brings into play the metaphor of a 'club of life' is evoked. This metaphor opens up options for the exploration of how a person's club of life is membered – of how this club of life is constituted through its membership, and how the membership of this club is arranged in terms of rank or status.

This idea of re-membering, together with the "club of life" metaphor, suggests possibilities for the co-researchers to engage in a revision of the membership of their club of life. This engagement provides them with the opportunity to have a greater say about the status of particular memberships of their club of life.

Through re-membering practices, the co-researchers can suspend or elevate, revoke or privilege, downgrade or upgrade specific memberships of their lives. Various classes of honorary membership can be established and bestowed, including life memberships.

In this way, re-membering practices can enable co-researchers to have more to say about whose voices they would like to be recognised on matters of their identity, and whose voices they would like to authorise to speak on such matters.

Apart from contributing to the co-researchers having a greater say about the status of the existing memberships of their club of life, re-membering practices can also contribute to options in regard to the selection of new memberships from persons and groups of persons who might be available and willing to join the co-researcher's club of life (White 1997:23).

This notion of re-membering also suggests possibilities and provides opportunities for persons to acknowledge more directly the important and valued contributions that others have made to their lives. When these opportunities are incorporated into re-membering practices, these other persons generally experience this as significantly honouring of them.

By engaging in these acknowledgements of the contributions of others to their lives, the co-researches also experienced their own lives being more richly described.

They discovered that such acts of acknowledgement allowed co-researches to re-activate dormant memberships through re-engaging with some of the figures of their history. The co-researchers discovered that through these acts, they were able to link the stories of their lives to the stories of the lives of others around particular themes, shared values and commitments.

Moreover, the co-researchers discovered that these practices of remembering generally made it more possible for them to experience, in their daily lives, the fuller presence of these figures, even when they were not available to be there in a material sense.

This is so with all relationships, but of particular significance for this dissertation, it is also so with people who have died.

White (1997:23) continues:

The sense of being joined in this way, and of experiencing one's life more richly described, contributes to new possibilities for action in the world. It also renders persons less vulnerable to experiences of being alone in the face of adversity- it provides an antidote to a sense of isolation.

One of the very difficult emotions during loss is the sense of “aloneness” and isolation. I resonate with Michael White’s suggestion regarding remembering practices: “re-connecting” with the “club of life” and similar practices can become a powerful antidote to the experience of isolation and aloneness. This was certainly the co-researchers’ experience during the journey. I will cover this in more detail in Chapter 7.

By inviting these conversations with significant people and relationships that have made meaning in their lives, the co-researchers were able to choose and honour who would be part of their club of life.

This was a very meaningful journey for each co-researcher: it afforded them the personal agency necessary to re-author their relationships - past, present and future. All the co-researchers added “leaves” - members of their “club of life - at different times during their journey under the Tree of Meaning.

In the next session, the co-researchers labelled their fruit. They shared stories about their achievements in life and how these have contributed to meaning-making in their lives. Agency was facilitated during these conversations and tellings.

As the stories were shared and thickened, each co-researcher found new and hopeful meanings. As they re-remembered what they had achieved in their lives, this often connected well with stories shared from the trunk of the Tree of Meaning.

Many “sparkling moments” or “unique outcomes” (discussed more fully in Chapter 6) were shared during these conversations. These enabled the co-researchers to feel more hopeful about their futures.

During the next session, the co-researchers “labelled their bugs”: they shared stories around the giants that challenge meaning-making in their life. The bug metaphor - not found in the Tree of Life metaphor - allowed the co-researchers to share their problem-saturated stories in a more playful way. This metaphor also allows one to externalize the problem in creative ways, like naming the bug and exploring creative ways of dealing with the bug.

Michael White talks about “double externalization” (White & Morgan, 2006:19) in which one externalizes the problem – that is, name the bug - and then explores creative ways of dealing with the problem/bug.

I found this approach facilitated many hopeful stories that were therapeutically significant. For example, the bug “gou-gou”, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 6.

During the last session, the co-researchers “labelled their fallen leaves”: they shared stories around their loved one who had passed away. This metaphor is also new: it is not found on the Tree of Life.

This value of this metaphor was also extended: when a leaf falls off a tree and drops to the ground, it ultimately nourishes the tree. As it decomposes, it becomes life-giving to the tree, thereby completing the cycle of life. This metaphor allowed the co-researchers to have conversations about their lost loved one in a way that does not re-traumatise them. Rather, it allows them to reinvest in their relationship with this person, and start the journey of finding and making meaning through this loss.

I found that the stories that emerged were very different from the thin, problem-saturated (grief) stories that were shared initially in therapy. In contrast, these stories were double – storied accounts, thick and rich with new meanings.

During all the sessions “taking it back” exercises were encouraged to help thicken stories of meaning and sparkling moments (White 2007:130 – 164).

These “taking it back” retellings also enable people to acknowledge their contribution to another’s story. This can bring “a sense that their suffering has not been for nothing. This can spark a sense of possibility that can ripple over other aspects of their life” (Denborough 2008:3) and thus bring new meaning.

I will share these “taking it back” exercises in Chapter 6.

During the journey I also encouraged using other documents like photographs and paintings to assist with meaning-making. I will elaborate further on these modalities in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 3

THE MANY VOICES IN GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT

As mentioned in the opening chapter of this dissertation, Neimeyer (2002:2) asserts that:

For most of the 20th century, bereavement was understood in quintessentially “modern” terms, as a process of "letting go" of one's attachment to the deceased person, "moving on" with one's life, and gradually "recovering" from the depression occasioned by the loss so as to return to "normal" behavior.

The psychological models that foster this way of thinking seem to assume that if we face our pain and work with our emotions, we will move forward to a new and better place.

In these models, emotional stages and tasks are seen as essential to the recovery process. They act as an authoritative road map, which promises a “cure” from grief once one arrives at the destination of closure.

I submit that grief has been transformed almost into a commodity. Phrases such as “working through”, “letting go” and “gaining closure” are common voices in grief talk, as if these were assets one could acquire. Researchers such as Stroebe et al (1993: 28) have questioned the validity of traditional theoretical frameworks for understanding the grief process. They have all failed to find evidence that supports the traditional perspectives on grief and loss:

At the most obvious level, scientific studies have failed to support any discernable sequence of emotional phases of adaptation to loss or to identify any clear endpoint to grieving that would designate a state of "recovery."

Neither is it clear that a universal and normative pattern of grieving exists that would justify the confident diagnosis of symptomatic deviations from this template as "disordered" or "pathological."

(Neimeyer 2002:2)

When I listen to the voices that Christian authors bring to the conversation of grief, they seem to be informed mainly by Kubler-Ross, Worden or Rando's work.

For example, in his book on Christian counselling, Collins (1998:347) suggests using William Worden's grief task model in which "...the griever encounters four often difficult and time consuming tasks."

In *Overcoming Grief and Trauma* - which contains some invaluable insights regarding pastoral counselling in grief and trauma - Lawrenz and Green (1995:24) tend to use Rando's three phase model: avoidance, confrontation and accommodation.

Junietta McCall, in *Bereavement Counselling: Pastoral care of complicated grieving* uses the metaphor of a grief journey. This is based on a modified version of Kubler – Ross's model, and includes the stages of shock and numbness; denial; feelings of depression; reorganisation; and recovery. She also speaks about grief trajectories and concludes that there are those grief journeys which are "complicated" and or "dysfunctional" and those that are "straightforward and sequential" (McCall 2004:55).

Warren and David Wiersbe, who are probably better known for their Bible commentaries, describe eight stages of grief in their book *Ministering to the Mourning*. They identify stages of shock; strong emotions; depression; fear; guilt; anger; apathy; and adjustment, but insist that these do not necessarily occur in this sequence.

They also acknowledge that "people die, but relationships never die, even if they exist only in our memories..." (Wiersbe & Wiersbe 2006:71).

Norman Wright frequently links the terms "recovery" and "saying good bye". He focuses on identifying and dealing with feelings.

In *Crisis and Trauma counselling*, Wright (2003:111) introduces a model called the “Tangled ball of emotions”. I have used this model frequently in grief work. Wright also offers some very practical ideas on remembering – what he calls “saying good bye” - such as creating a remembrance list, journaling, writing letters and other practical means of grief therapy.

In *Recovering from the losses in life*, Wright (2002:124) uses a very detailed modified Kubler - Ross model to assist the client to identify, to isolate and to adjust to a wide range of emotions and feelings that emerge during the grief journey.

Just before she died in 2004, Elizabeth Kubler–Ross (with David Kessler) wrote *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*. In this new book Kubler-Ross expresses her concern about the way her work has been misunderstood – a concern which I expressed in Chapter One of this dissertation:

The stages have evolved since their introduction, and they have been very misunderstood over the past three decades. They were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. The five stages....are part of a framework ...they are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling. But they are not stops on some linear timeline in grief.

(Kubler–Ross & Kesler 2005:7)

Hedkte outlines the various shifts that are taking place in grief counseling:

By any standard, the field of grief counselling is in revolution. The long-standing Freudian view of grieving as a process of decathexis of emotional energy from a lost loved one is under assault by critics within the psychodynamic tradition (Hagman, 1995).

Scholars from many orientations are questioning popular models of mourning as a series of emotional stages of adaptation to loss (Corr 1993; Worden 1995). Moreover, recent research evidence fails to support those cherished models which assumed that grieving is necessarily associated with depression; that the absence of grief is pathological; that a complicated process of “working through” is critical to recovery; or that grieving can be resolved through a return to one’s pre-loss status (Stroebe 1992 ; Wortman & Silver 1987).

As a result of this widespread critique of traditional grief theory, there seems to be a newfound openness to perspectives on bereavement as a human experience. In response to these trends, I have tried to develop the outlines of an alternative model of mourning- one that argues that meaning reconstruction in response to a loss is the central process in grieving. In keeping with the broader constructivist approach to psychotherapy from which it derives (Neimeyer & Mahoney 1995), this approach is informed by a view of human beings as inveterate meaning makers. Human beings weave narratives that give thematic significance to the salient plot structure of their lives (Neimeyer & Stewart 1996). By using culturally available systems of belief, individuals are thus able to construct innovative, permeable and provisional meaning structures that help them interpret experiences, coordinate their relationships with others, and organize their actions toward personally significant goals (Kelly 1955).

More importantly, however, these frameworks of meaning are anchored less in some “objective” reality, than in specific negotiations with intimate others and general systems of cultural discourse. One implication of this social constructionist view is that the themes on which people draw to attribute significance to their lives will be as variegated as the local conversations in which they are engaged and as complex as the crosscurrents of shared belief systems that inform their personal attempts at meaning-making (Neimeyer 1998b). A further implication of this view is that people may feel varying degrees of “authorship” over the narratives of their lives. Some may have a sense of a deeply personal commitment to their beliefs, values, and choices, while others may feel estranged from those beliefs and expectations that they experience as imposed on them by others in their social networks or by communal ideologies (Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston 1997)

Recently, there has been an emerging shift in thanatology. A few cutting edge authors have offered challenges to previously understood meanings about death and grief. Klass, Silverman and Nickman's *Continuing Bonds* (1996) is one such account that stretches the model of individual grief. Robert Neimeyer (1998) and Thomas Attig (2000) have included pivotal work to incorporate meaning-making, cultural stories and relational aspects of the dying experience. The thinking promoted in narrative therapy and social constructionism takes the field of death, dying and bereavement further still.

It suggests that we place the relationship in the foreground rather than the life of the individual (Gergen 1994). Our families, friends, colleagues and community all participate in the creation of the stories by which we know ourselves and through which our identity is shaped. In these stories, we construct the membership of our relational world (Gergen 1994; Cottor & Cottor 1999). These stories and memberships transcend the physical reality of death. For instance, how common is it for us to hear about similar personality traits between our children and our dead grandparents? We look to these legacies to give meaning and richness to our existence. The deceased can continue to be thought of as a spouse, a parent, a child, a friend, a co-worker and a community member. As such, their voice continues to influence our present day choices and actions. There are no endings to these relationships except those that we arbitrarily create. With a narrative lens, I can support this continuation of relationship in story

(Hedkte 2001: 2).

I submit, without being too simplistic, that when one looks through all the evidence contained in the literature on loss, grief and mourning, one hears basically two voices:

- The one voice says that we need to “move on” through various stages or complete certain tasks so that we can ultimately recover and find closure.
- The other voice essentially views grief as a process of meaning reconstruction and narrative revision, through re-remembering.

CHAPTER 4

4 MEMORY AND METAPHORS OF REMEMBERING

4.1 MEMORY

Throughout this dissertation I use the term memory and re-membering interchangeably. The aim of my research is to see what the role of memory (re-membering) is specifically in the meaning-making process when faced with the shattering effects of grief through the loss of a loved one. As my research approach uses narrative ideas in qualitative research, there is no empirical data. The primary data source is the stories shared by the co-researchers as they loiter under the Tree of Meaning – the research metaphor.

Since a major study into the physiology and psychology of memory falls outside of the scope of this work, I will only provide a short introduction to some key understandings of memory.

In order to form new memories, information must be changed into a usable form. This occurs through the process known as “encoding”. Once information has been successfully encoded, it is stored in memory for later use.

Much of this stored memory lies outside of our awareness for most of the time. When we need to use stored memories, a retrieval process allows us to bring these into conscious awareness.

Long-term memory refers to the continuing storage of information. This information is largely outside of our awareness, but can be called into working memory to be used.

Long term memory, and more specifically autobiographical memory, is the memory we tap into when we re-member. It is stored and retrieved by association. I believe that the Tree of Meaning metaphor - by being a vehicle for association - really assists long term memory. One of my co-researchers remembered her grandmother's home; then by association, memories of shining wooden floors (visual), memories of freshly baked bread (smell), and of feeling safe (emotional) memories flooded back into her consciousness.

Not all memory is easily retrievable. Traumatic memory - which resides in the part of our brain known as the amygdale – can be especially difficult to retrieve. These are often referred to as situationally accessible memories (SAMs).

I suggest that because the Tree of Meaning metaphor afforded the co-researchers a safe place to stand during therapy, they were able to access some of these traumatic memories too, without being re-traumatized.

I fully agree with Bruner's (1990:4) suggestion that "we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings in the form of narratives."

We can thus more easily access memories and story them by using narrative ideas, such as re-membering conversations.

Morgan (2003:10) in her work on memory boxes comments that “memory work or re-membering in a narrative therapy sense is like a rear view mirror in a car that is going forwards.”

In the context of this dissertation, Freud’s suggestion - that the completion of the mourning process requires that those left behind develop a new reality in which no longer includes what has been lost – seems to be short-sighted.

It would seem that that full recovery from mourning may restore what has been lost and maintain it through incorporation into the present. Meyerhoff (1982:111) and Attig (1996:48) assert that “remembering is not a retreat into the past; rather, memory brings aspects of the past into present awareness.”

If we were to think back to loved ones of ours who have passed away, “we will notice how an ongoing relationship with them in memory takes place alongside other relationships” (Hedkte 2003: 4).

It is as if their legacy in memory consists of their lifetimes, remembered moments, episodes, periods, and stories, none of which is cancelled by death (Hedkte 2003:2; White 1998: 8).

In *A Grief Observed*, C.S Lewis (1976:51-52) illustrates this legacy very well:

... and then suddenly at the very moment when, so far, I mourned H. least, I remembered her best. Instead it was something (almost) better than memory; an instantaneous, unanswerable impression. To say it was like a meeting would be going too far. Yet there was that in it which tempts one to use those words. It was as if the lifting of the sorrow removed a barrier.

Attig (1996:47) suggests that although our memories are incomplete and partial, we can extend and modify our individual memories through exchanging, discussing and exploring memories with others. This is exactly what we did when we used the Tree of Meaning metaphor. We also found that as we shared our stories, we resonated with memories, understandings and meanings that complemented our own. Through this resonance, we found new meanings. This is why I introduced the “Forest of meaning” definitional ceremony into our research process.

This ceremony gave the co-researchers another opportunity to exchange, discuss and explore memories with others - in this case, others had also lost a loved one through death - thereby thickening the resonance, and, hopefully also, the collaborative meaning-making.

Michael White (1988:22) makes the following comment regarding memory in the context of the “Saying Hullo Metaphor” which I will touch on later:

The memories that they touched off were not just a factual account of historical events, but a full and vivid re-living of experience, one that incorporated the person’s various senses and emotions.

The significance of White’s observation lies in the fact that when we use metaphors, such as the “saying hullo” metaphor or the “Tree of Meaning” metaphor, the memories that we access, by association, are not only in the landscape of action (that is, a factual account of historical events) but also in the landscape of identity (that is, a vivid re-living of experience which incorporates the person’s various senses and emotions).

When one remembers in these dual landscapes – action and identity - the stories and meanings are much thicker.

Thomas Attig (1996:47-48) reminds us that, contrary to traditional grief theory, “remembering is not a retreat into the past; rather memory brings aspects of the past into present awareness.” He goes on to say that memories are the “basis for deeper lasting love” and can thus help us “to see how we already hold those who have died in other places: in practical life and in the lives of our souls and spirits.”

Attig(1996:47- 48) makes what I regard as a life-giving and hopeful observation that it is through our re-remembering that we can “make meaning through deepening the ties with our lost loved ones and allow them to permeate further the fabric of our daily lives and the next chapters of our life narratives .”

4.2 TREE OF MEANING METAPHOR

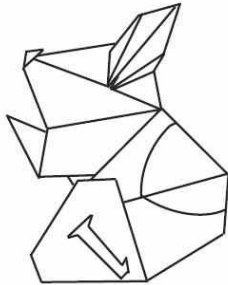
This metaphor has already been discussed in detail in Chapter 2 and will be developed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

4.3 THE ORIGAMI OF REMEMBERING METAPHOR

Lorraine Hedkte (2003:1-6) introduces the metaphor of the “origami of remembering”. She uses it to describe the process of folding and re-folding the stories of people’s lives and how these are linked to those who have passed away:

[I]n the field of death and grief, we are at a turning point. No longer can we comfortably use the metaphors that were offered through a modernist paradigm. It no longer makes sense to see us as distant from those who have died or as having gone through a series of tasks or stages to achieve a utopian-like peace without them.

Hedkte draws her inspiration for the Origami metaphor from the ancient Japanese art of folding paper.



As Hedkte speaks with people after their loved one has died, she recalls the beauty of the folding metaphor. She likes to think of each person's life as having the posthumous potential to become an elaborate folded work of art:

With each retelling of the stories of someone's life, especially when these are being told to a new person – someone who has never met the deceased – it is as if the deceased person's stories are being folded into seams and creases that give contour and texture to the lives of the living.

As the stories of the deceased continue to influence our lives in the present, it is as if our folding and unfolding brings the person into three-dimensional life.

The stories that are folded into being may indeed hold water. They may even do more than this – they may make the lives of the living worth living.

(Hedkte 2003: 5-6)

I find Hedkte's statement profound. One senses the agency that is found those stories which "may make the lives of the living worth living."

Hedkte goes on to explain that:

The folding metaphor evokes the idea that layers of experience and their meanings are built up through processes of social construction and as these events and experiences are remembered, each conversation becomes a new fold and adds an extra layer of meaning. The inclusion of the loved ones we have lost in our present communities creates certain folds that give structure and meaning to our lives and in this process of folding relationship back on itself we thicken the meanings of our lives. With each crease we more richly describe preferred stories of identity and perhaps create entirely new shapes. Every re-telling places new folds in the multi-dimensional “origami of identity” and in doing so constructs, celebrates and creates new clubs of life. Each storytelling, re-telling and refolding, acts as a definitional ceremony (White 1997). Through the recounting of a person’s life, we actively participate in defining their (or our collaborative) preferred identities. We ceremonially mark the creases and shape the folds that create and define our “identity origami”. Definitional ceremonies are not only grand large scale rituals that might be performed around a memorial service, or as a conversation at the narrative therapist’s office. Small scale definitional ceremonies also occur in day-to-day moments when we notice and bring to life the stories of our deceased loved ones.

Whenever we share a small sentence or two of recollection and remembrance, whether it is with a family member, a co-worker, a neighbour or a friend, we are continuing to define and celebrate our relationships with those who have died and to add subtle new folds to the shapes of our identities.

In this fashion, we all are simultaneously ordinary and famous. Fame does not need to belong exclusively to the movie stars and the affluent. This assumption usurps the importance of relational identity and re-membering practices. If we think of fame as the product of bringing what is unique about the identity of a person alive in other people’s consciousness, then even so-called ‘ “ordinary” lives can achieve fame. Fame, in this sense, is an experience of identity that comes from being known and recognised by others. We are all famous to those who love us.

This rendition of fame assumes we all have something unique to contribute to the meaning of life. As news of a person's unique story spreads, others' lives become linked around certain themes.

I would like to honour Lorraine Hedktes' work. She has assisted me to make a paradigm shift in my thinking regarding grief work. Her origami metaphor opens up many new possibilities for us as therapists and for our clients, as we move away from traditional grief therapy models.

I enclose an extract from a personal letter:

I hope our paths cross someday – I would be most interested in knowing more of your research. I am completing a dissertation presently in a similar vein about re-memembering practices. I know the tree of life – a practice that lives with the landscape of action. I like the idea very much about the Tree of Meaning – a flushing out of the landscape of meanings. Michael and Brunner would be pleased.

(Letter from Hedkte April 2008)

4.4 SAYING HULLO METAPHOR

Michael White (1988:18) explains that he started

... [e]xploring the “saying hullo” metaphor and its application to grief work after particular experiences in therapy with persons who have been diagnosed elsewhere as suffering from “delayed grief” or “pathological mourning”. Many of these persons have received intensive and lengthy treatments that have been oriented by the normative model of the grief process, or by the chemical approach to life's problems.

Guided by the “saying hullo metaphor”, White formulated and introduced questions that he hoped would open up possibilities for his clients to reclaim their relationships with lost loved ones.

He was so surprised by the effect which these questions had in the resolution of the client’s sense of emptiness and feelings of depression that he decided to explore the metaphor further (White 1988: 18 -19).

White (1988:22 - 23) suggests that:

... [t]he questions that seemed most helpful in assisting persons to reclaim these important relationships were the ones that invited a recounting of what they perceived to be the deceased person’s positive experience of them. This recounting was an expression of their experience of specific aspects of the deceased person’s experience. These questions had an immediate and visible effect.

The memories that they touched off were not just a factual account of historical events, but a full and vivid re-living of experience, one that incorporated the person’s various senses and emotions. It was clear that, in this recounting, a re-experience of past selves was triggered off.

Various lost or forgotten knowledge’s of self, seemed to become available for persons to express.

White (1988: 24) concludes his paper on the “saying hullo metaphor” with the following remarks:

- The persons that consulted me over problems with unresolved grief have found the “saying hullo” metaphor, and the questions derived from this metaphor, to be helpful.
- Their attitude towards their self becomes a more accepting and embracing one, and they come to treat themselves with greater kindness and compassion.

- In focusing here on the “saying hullo” metaphor, I am not taking a position against the utilisation of the saying goodbye metaphor. There is much to say goodbye to, including to a material reality and to hopes and expectations, etc.
- Having said this, I would argue that every experience of loss is unique, as are the requirements for the resolution of every loss. Any metaphor is only helpful to the extent that it recognises, and facilitates the expression of, this uniqueness, and doesn’t subject persons to normative specifications.

Once again this metaphor, as with the other metaphors discussed in this chapter, emphasises the importance of having re-remembering conversations that open up possibilities for our clients to reclaim their relationships with lost loved ones as they re-member.

REFLECTION

As I reflected on all this information and my thoughts in the context of this research, I found myself wondering, “What is the connection between memory, metaphor and meaning?”

Re-remembering practices can help us to access our “autobiographical memory”. This insight has been confirmed by what I see in therapy, what I have learnt through the research process and from my ongoing journey with narrative ideas. Moreover, through the telling and re-telling of stories, with the aid of metaphor, we can re-author these memories.

Frequently during these re-authoring conversations new meanings of these memories are constructed. The question remains, however: Is there any academic proof and reason for these assumptions?

I GOOGLED “Memory, metaphor, and meaning” and found a very interesting journal article entitled *Emotional Memory, Metaphor and Meaning* by Arnold Modell MD. Without going too deeply into the psychology that informs his comments, I have taken the following excerpts from this paper because they shed some light on my question: namely, “What is the connection between memory, metaphor and meaning?”

Modell (2005:1) suggests that

...[w]e are born with the capacity to construct inter-subjective meanings in reaction to the interchange of feelings. The value, significance, or meaning that we construct in relation to the other is based on the memory of feelings and from birth onwards feelings cannot be separated from their representation in memory.

He also explains that in traumatic experiences, such as the loss of a loved one, there is “a retrospective alteration of its meaning. This alteration of meaning is a defence mechanism that disrupts the memory of the event by means of repression or displacement of feelings” (Modell 2005: 3).

Model continues: “metaphor functions as a pattern detector so that meaning of an old relationship is unconsciously transferred into the here and now and that metaphor is truly the currency of the mind” (2005: 4).

My reflections on my practice, together with some new insight gleaned from my research, have enabled me to submit the following as an idea of the how memory, metaphor and meaning are connected in the context of grief therapy and, more specifically, in the context of this dissertation.

- As humans we are “meaning seekers” (Marcu 2007: 58-59).
- From birth we continuously construct meaning in reaction to the interchange of feelings or emotions.
- When we experience trauma, like the death of a loved one, there is an alteration of these meanings. This defence mechanism, which we often see in therapy, disrupts memory. At the outset of their journey, all the co-researchers said that their memories were blurred for the immediate past, and that they had almost no memories of childhood and teenage years.
- Metaphor - like the Tree of Meaning - functions as a “pattern detector so that meaning of old relationships (in this disrupted memory) is unconsciously transferred in the present” (Modell 2005:4). According to Modell, the metaphor is like the “currency”, the means of transfer of meanings which are linked to memories in our minds.

I will reflect on and discuss this idea in more detail in Chapter 7, where I will attempt to pull all the threads, conclusions and ideas together.

CHAPTER 5

5. MEANING-MAKING

From the beginning of time, humankind has tried to make sense of human existence. We seem to have an inherent need to create meaning in our lives. Meaning-making is central to our lives. Rebecca Chopp, in her book *The Praxis of Suffering* suggests that “the human subject is a meaning seeker” (Marcu 2007: 58-59).

The existential theorist Victor Frankl, in his well-known work *Man’s search for meaning*, says that people are driven by a psychological need to find and make meaning. This drive allows them to face and rise above the trials life brings, and to face whatever life brings - even death itself – with some sense of meaning.

Frankl (1992:115) observed that the need for meaning is a fundamental human motivational factor. Humankind comes to the conclusion that there is no reason to go on living in a world in which there is no meaning. Frankl goes on to say that he believes that the ability for people to survive is dependent on their ability to derive meaning and purpose for their suffering.

Other scholars, such as Nadeau (1998:56) and Weiler (2001:83) concur. They consider meaning-making essential to grief work. They all seem to agree that one cannot recover from the loss of a loved one unless the meaning-making process is successful.

These scholars view meaning-making as a process that can be successful or not in ensuring coherence of one's personal story.

But there are other authors - such as Davis, Wortman, Lehman and Silver (2000:497-540) – who submit that in many cases, meaning is not found. They argue that meaning-making is not an essential element in coping with loss. In this case, these authors view meaning-making as finding that satisfactory explanation as a specific cognitive result of grief work.

A literature review reveals that there are still many debates regarding meaning-making. Nadeau (1998:8) proposes that meaning-making is a social and dynamic process; and Feifel (1990:538) asserts that meaning-making is a set of individual knowledge.

Attig (1996:33) suggests that as we grieve, we relearn a complex world. Our relearning is multidimensional: it involves simultaneously finding and making meaning on many levels.

I find Attig's (1996: 55) differentiation between *making* meaning and *finding* meaning helpful:

...*making* meaning, strongly suggests that we are self-consciously active, take deliberate initiative, and bring new meanings into existence as we grieve.... [Whereas] *finding* meaning strongly suggests that at other times we are less self-conscious in what we do, and are more passive or receptive, and return to or encounter something already established, and often not of our own doing, as we mourn.

Attig (1996:58) goes on to explain the journey of finding meaning as follows:

We unreflectively return to experiences and actions that hold familiar meanings. We become aware of and accept meanings that seemed to arise spontaneously in our suffering. We find our way home within surroundings filled with well-established meaning.

We learned to trust elements of our daily life patterns that remain viable. We find that some long-held hopes and aspirations still move us down familiar life paths. We recognize meaningful continuity in our life narratives and the characters we embody in them. And we often deepen our appreciation of familiar understandings of a place in the larger scheme of things.

Meaning-making and our sense of objective reality are linked. Berger and Luckmann (1967: 23) assert that reality can be understood by individuals as their lived experience, common sense, and the knowledge of day-to-day habitual behaviours. When these are acted out in life, one gains a sense of objective reality. Our experiences are interpreted in terms of this objective reality and make meaning for the individual when they are perceived as making sense in terms of that objective reality.

Events - like the death of a loved one - that cannot be explained and are outside of the bounds of this reality tend to shatter these realities and their meaning-making. In response to this “shattered reality”, individuals have to re-construct or re-author their reality in order to accommodate this new reality. As it is at present, it does not fit into their previously held reality, or paradigm.

Crossley (2000:11) suggests that the sensory and perceptual faculties of human beings do not serve merely as conduits which enable an experience of the world, but also act interpretively to create meaning of events in terms of their interconnectedness.

He continues that “it is the connections or relationships among events that constitute their meanings and cultural meaning systems, such as language, provide the context for the creation of meaning” (2000:11).

I believe that the Tree of Meaning metaphor not only assists people to discover these connections, but also facilitates the finding and making of new meaning. It seems as if the metaphor helps put the “shattered” puzzle pieces of meaning back together. The puzzle does, however, look different from what it looked like before it was shattered by grief. This “difference” is the new meaning that has been found and made, through the re-authoring that has taken place as the co-researcher has re-membered with the aid of the Tree of Meaning metaphor.

This ties in well with Modell's (2005: 555-568) theory that the “metaphor functions as a pattern detector so that the meaning of an old relationship is unconsciously transferred into the here and now and that metaphor is truly the currency of the mind.”

5.1 Meaning re-construction

Robert Neimeyer (2002:263), in *Meaning Reconstruction and the Experience of Loss*, suggests that “whatever the status of an external reality, its meaning for us is determined by our construction of its significance, rather than the ‘brute facts’ themselves.”

Our minds actively structure experience according to its own ordering system (Kant 1965: 8) and narratives are one of those ordering systems (Bruner 1986: 32). Within that ordering system, we co-author these narratives. We often struggle to construct meaningful accounts of these important events in our lives, as our sense of meaning and sense of identity is challenged by the loss of a loved one. We thus revise, edit and even rewrite these accounts, so that we find new strands of meaning in our stories that bridge the past and the future in a way that makes sense to us (Neimeyer 2002: 263).

Attig (1996: 36) suggests that these narratives are the “heart of the matter” and that, when we are bereaved, we “seek safe contexts in which we can tell and re-tell our stories of loss, hoping that the therapist can bear to hear what others cannot, validating our pain as real without resorting to simple *cliché* reassurance.”

I found Attig’s comment regarding the therapist “being able to bear to hear what others cannot and validating the client’s pain as real without resorting to simple *cliché* reassurance” a great challenge, both in the context of this research and as a pastoral therapist. I realised that the Tree of Meaning metaphor, in the hands of a “de-centred” therapist, can really assist our clients find this safe context in which to tell their stories and to feel that their pain is being validated “without resorting to simple *cliché* reassurance.”

Meaning re-construction emphasises responses to bereavement from a perspective of an individual’s unique searching to make sense of the disruptive events, caused by the loss. This search for meaning is usually expressed in the narrative form. Meaning is framed in terms of the individual’s unique interpretation, beliefs and identity. This re-construction of meaning is multilayered and shaped in language, cultural practices, spiritual traditions and interpersonal conversations.

Meaning reconstruction in loss does not only imply making meaning regarding the bereavement. It also involves making meaning about self (sense of identity) and the life in general that the loss brings.

Norman Wright (2003: 76) speaks about secondary losses: those things in one's life that are changed by and through the loss. In the case of losing a spouse, these "secondary losses" could include the loss of income, loss of security, the need to enter the workforce again, and loss of identity as a married person.

I can remember the huge feeling of loss and insecurity the first time I made a cross in the box "widower" on a bank form. Often, one feels these secondary losses in very profound and painful ways: they are so real, and visit us in everyday life, as we journey with grief.

The concept of "secondary losses" is important, especially because meaning-making is not static, successful or unsuccessful. Instead, meanings are constantly being re-authored in order to find and make meaning in the context of our ever-changing life situations. These include making meaning out of the loss of a loved one.

5.2 Meaning-making and relearning our world.

Thomas Attig (1996:33-53), in a paper called *How we grieve: Relearning the World*, suggests that “grieving involves nothing less than relearning the world of our experience.”

This task of “relearning” is complicated because this “world consists of an intimate combination of parts or elements not easy to unravel or separate.”

Attig suggests that, as we grieve, we respond in two principal and interrelated ways. First, we struggle to put our lives back together in a process he calls “relearning our world”; and second, we struggle to come to terms with the pain and anguish that comes with the death of a loved one.

Nevertheless, through this process we:

...reweave the fabric of our lives and come to a new wholeness, as we redirect and once again experience continuity and meaning in our daily narratives and in this process there is a blend of making and finding meaning.

(Attig 1996: 38)

This is certainly what I have experienced through the stories of my co-researchers. As they have journeyed under the Tree of Meaning and shared multilayered stories (memory) from many different aspects of their lives and lived experience, they have been able to reweave the fabric of their lives. As they find and make meaning, they come to a new wholeness in their lives.

I also resonate with Attig's concept of relearning the world of our experience. Attig includes many areas of our lives in which this relearning needs to take place. This allows for a more inclusive meaning-making experience. These areas of relearning also tie in very well with the metaphorical descriptions of the different parts of the tree meaning:

1. We relearn our physical surroundings (Roots and soil in Tree of Meaning). This includes:
 - 1.1 The things that are left behind by the deceased.
 - 1.2 Everyday places like home, rooms, workplaces, schools, and places of worship and other public places.
 - 1.3 Special places: for example, where we grew up, where we first met our loved one who has passed away, significant places where we reached turning points in our lives, places where we lived together and knew intimacy.
 - 1.4 We are challenged by their absence during significant times - like holidays, festive seasons, birthdays, weddings, anniversaries - and in times of need.
2. We relearn our physical surroundings (Leaves in the Tree of Meaning / our Club of life). This includes:
 - 2.1 Our most intimate relationships, like our parents, spouse, children, relatives, and close friends.
 - 2.2 Our less intimate relationships, like casual acquaintances, work colleagues, teachers and classmates.

- 2.3 People and relationships that were valued and had meaning in the lives of those who have died.
3. We relearn ourselves, our characters, our histories and roots, our skills and knowledges (Roots, branches, trunk, fruits, and bugs in the Tree of Meaning).
4. We relearn our self esteem, our preferred identity and sense of belonging (Branches, trunk, and fruits in the Tree of Meaning).
5. We relearn our relationship with those who have died (Fallen leaf in the Tree of Meaning).

Attig's work on meaning-making and relearning our world encouraged me greatly. Part of my discomfort with the more traditional forms of grief therapy is that we tend to only focus on the loss itself. We never allow our clients to have conversations and to tell stories regarding all the other aspects of their lives: those parts which have been shattered through the loss as well as those that make us stronger.

I was also encouraged when I realised how the Tree of Meaning metaphor facilitates conversations in most - if not all – of the dimensions of our lives that need relearning as we seek to find meaning.

Interestingly, I did not have the benefit of these reflections and insights when I initially designed the Tree of Meaning metaphor.

We relearn in all the dimensions of our lives and, as we do, we relearn ourselves. Emotionally, we temper the pain of suffering; and psychologically, we renew our self confidence, self esteem and preferred identity (Attig 1996: 41).

This is an ongoing journey or process, as revealed in C.S Lewis' writing:

I thought I could describe a state; make a map of sorrow. Sorrow, however, turns out not to be a state but a process. It needs not a map but a history, and if I don't stop writing that history at some quite arbitrary point, there's no reason why I should ever stop. There is something new to be chronicled every day. (Lewis 1997:68-69)

5.3 Spirituality and meaning-making

I use and identify with the term "spirituality" as put forward by Kotzé and Kotzé (2001: 75) :

We use the term "spirituality" rather than "theology" because the term theology literally means to study God, whereas the concept of spirituality is more inclusive, focusing on any of our experiences including theological ideas and narratives about the Other whom some call Friend/God/Goddess/Divine.

This does not mean that as a minister of religion I am getting into pantheism. I believe that by using the term "spirituality", I am better able and open to have conversations (God-talk) with co-researchers, clients and indeed people who attend church, irrespective of their religious background.

In my experience as a minister and as a therapist, crises almost always initiate questions around meaning in our lives. In turn, this often leads to conversations around spirituality.

Shanefield, Benjamin and Swain (1984:1092-1094) found that almost two-thirds of participants in their study experienced an increased sense of spirituality. A study done by Davis and Nolen-Hoeksema (2001: 734) indicates that having religious or spiritual beliefs appear to assist the process of meaning-making after loss.

According to Golsworthy and Coyle (1999: 32), we use our religious and spiritual beliefs to create a structure of meaning that gives us a sense of order and purpose to our existence and to our death.

They also mention that it is important to be aware of the complexity of this process, such as the complex interactions between our belief system, our response to loss and how we experience faith in our spirituality.

In their research, Golsworthy and Coyle (1999: 38) found that a key element of faith is the nature of our relationship with God. For some people, this relationship was intimate and built around a deep trust. For others, their experience of bereavement appeared to shake their faith, and frequently led to questioning and doubt about their faith and their relationship with God.

Faith and hope go hand in hand. Hope is a significant component of spirituality which gives a sense of purpose to the loss.

For many bereaved people, the hope of meeting the deceased again in the next world is a significant aspect of hope, in the midst of despair over the loss.

This “meeting” naturally depends on the person’s faith base. In my experience with Christian people, hope of eternal life and meeting ones loved one in heaven one day, gives significant hope. In the initial part of our grief journey, this is often all the hope we have.

Professor Park (2008:1) raises some interesting reflections on spirituality as a meaning-making system:

Psychologists have found that people who have a strong religious faith react more profoundly to the death of loved ones than those with no faith system at all. The study which included 169 college students of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths as well as non believers discovered that the religious people had more of a disruption in their beliefs and goals after the death of somebody close to them. Those students with a strong religious background became more depressed in the weeks and months immediately following the death than their non-believing counterparts.

This included a questioning of God, a questioning of the beliefs, and a wrestling with their own worldview. The good news seemed to be that after six months or so, the pain had lessened significantly for those with beliefs in God, and most reported their faith had deepened.

Over time, as people are making meaning from their loss, these negative effects disappear or even get reversed, suggesting a positive association between religion and long-term adjustments. Religious faith ultimately serves as a meaning system, in which the bereaved person can reframe their loss and move on in positive ways.

I believe that there is space for more research into how people from different “spiritual backgrounds” make meaning through grief, especially in a country like South Africa where we have such a diversity of cultures and spirituality. This discussion falls outside the scope of this dissertation.

Reflection

As I reflected on meaning-making, especially in the context of grief work, I believe along with many other voices – such as Nadeau, Weiler, Frankl, Neimeyer and Attig - that meaning-making is essential to grief work. Sometimes I feel, however, as if meaning-making seems a vast and uncharted universe which makes it difficult to understand.

I found the following extract from a PhD dissertation by Anne-Marie Lyndall (2004) very helpful in narrowing down some of the common areas of meaning-making. It also reminded me that meaning-making, like the journey through grief, is unique, personal and idiosyncratic:

In contrast to Frankl's (1964a) belief that meaning must be discovered, there is no global meaning that the bereaved person must find, but rather a process of creating or constructing a significant new understanding. Wheeler (2001) has identified some common areas of meaning-making as being altruistically motivated, valuing life, accepting that which cannot be changed, valuing the spiritual above the materialistic, and finding new religious-spiritual beliefs. Some bereaved parents find meaning from personal growth, such as feeling better about oneself, becoming a better person, and pursuing further education.

CHAPTER 6

“All human beings have an innate desire to hear and tell stories and to have a story to live by.”

(Harvey Cox)

6. Tree of Meaning stories

In this chapter I move from the theoretical to the practical, in the sense that so far, I have “set the scene for the research” and now am going to look at the “results” or “data” of the research.

Within the context of narrative qualitative research, the aim of the research is not such much about data collection, but rather the co-construction of new meanings in a collaborative process with my co-researchers, as we reflect and interpret the “results” or “data” in the form of their stories shared as they loiter under the Tree of Meaning – the research metaphor.

Instead of including the complete transcripts of each co-researchers story, which would make this dissertation very long, I have included an edited version, co-authored with the co-researcher. This edited version also allows me to *care with* my co-researchers, thereby protecting them ethically and confidentially.

6.1 Clive's Tree of Meaning stories

ROOTS - Family history, origins, places of meaning

Stellenbosch University

This was the most shaping and defining time of my life. I found significance as an athlete, became independent away from home. I was able to establish my identity as Clive and, for the first time in my life, I knew where I was going.

Sport / Athletics

I was a Natal champion runner in the 800, 1 500 m. Attained Springbok colours with Olympic qualifying time for 1 500 m at the Montreal Olympics 1976. A lifelong dream, with the 5th fastest time in SA ever, but due to the political climate we were not allowed to compete in the Olympics. I was also able to run a mile under 4 minutes (3.58) 30 years ago.

Two nagging questions that I often ask:

If I was able to attend the Olympic Games, what could I have achieved?

Karin told me before she died that she wanted to be a middle distance runner like me: What could Karin have achieved?

Family

Still close to my Mom and Dad – I really appreciate how my dad supported me “big time” when I was at US.

Uncle James / Aunty Yolande

Both have been significant throughout my life. Their daughter Shirley and I are still very close.

Roger Street House

The Dale family was formed here; Karin / Neale grew up there and we have many fond memories of growing up as a family here. Memories of playing in the garden, in the fig tree. Having travelling meals in the neighbourhood.

The children would walk to school. We were settled and safe as a family here for 15 years.

After Karin's death I lost interest in the garden, lost interest in the "house". We spoke of the roses that were given to Clive and Juana after Karin's death. They still have three of them, which they transplanted at the new house. One significant rose, a pink rose, was given to them on the first anniversary of Karin's death by their GP, Dr. Louise Serfontein. It is still in their garden in the new house.

Hermanus Holiday House

This has always been a special place to go away to. For Clive it is a place of safety, a place for rebuilding. "It is the only place where I can really switch off, feel that I can rejuvenate as I walk along the cliff path overlooking the sea, walking through the forests and along the mountain paths with wonderful sea views." Clive remembers how he would study for his IMM while at the house and "how I have spent time rebuilding here after Karin's death."

Edgemead House

Clive and Juana's first house as newlyweds. They have many fond memories of life before they had Karin and Neale.

Verborgfontein

Family farm near Richmond, where Karin's ashes are scattered. There is a photograph of the area on the "Tree of Meaning" This is a very significant place for Clive. Whenever they visit the farm, both Clive and Juana visit this place a few times, just to remember and re-connect with Karin.

SOIL - Significant events that shaped your life, made meaning

Juana's breast cancer.

A time when I had to face the reality of losing my wife. This impacted my life in that achievement was not my primary focus, for a while at least.

Dad's support when I was at Stellenbosch University

Dad giving me the option of a 2nd year support at SU, as I was struggling with the Afrikaans.

Meeting Juana – major event Number 1 in my life

Just knowing from the first time I saw her that she was the lady I was going to marry.

Teacher in Matric

He helped me when I failed mock Matric, and still wanted to go to University. He believed in me, he encouraged and helped me.

High School teacher

Encouraged me to excel in athletics, he shaped me as an athlete.

Holding Karin for the first time when she was born – Major event Number 2 in my life

Karin's accident and death on 28th August 2001 - major event Number 3 in my life

Third retrenchment

Christmas 2006

The first time since Karin's death that they spent a Christmas with Clive's parents – a significant restorative time.

Realising that teaching was not 'IT'

Can't really define it / haven't really found it.

Morning on the hockey field when 'ambush Grief' hit me

I was on the hockey field one Saturday morning, when this emotional /physiological symptom took hold of me – I took strain for days.

'It was like carrying a rock – the rock is getting lighter. *We celebrated this alternative story of the rock getting lighter together*

Clash restoration with Neale.

Neale and I met to chat and resolve some issues – defining moment in their relationship as father and son.

Completing my B Phys Ed and IMM diploma

Gave me a sense of achievement for a while.

TRUNK - Skills, talents, spiritual gifts, training

Focused / analytical

I am very task orientated and focused. I tend to ask the “why?” question – but there is no answer.

I tend to dwell on Karin’s death, all consuming at times, has become less over the past 6 years – *Another alternative story we celebrated.*

I have many positive memories, which are good to remember, they are rich memories, but they do cause pain sometimes.

Learning / Teaching

I learned to be more compassionate and considerate of other people since Karin passed away. Before that I was self-centred and self-focused. I did the GriefShare program. Reading literature on grief and bereavement, I learnt a lot about myself and the grief process, which has helped me on my journey through grief, but it has also allowed me to assist others in grief.

My empathy and mercy levels have increased and I have a passion to help people who have lost children through death.

I enjoy helping others as I *share* my pain and insights of grief with others. I have become a student of grief. *A very life giving alternative story from fallen leaf, it speaks of amazing transport and new meaning-making.*

Thinking things through

This is linked to being focused and analytical, these skills are part of who I am. I often think through issues relating to Karin’s death, try to put reason to the loss – not knowing, not getting answers, but am learning to accept. *Part of finding and making meaning*

See through the clutter to the real issue

I tend to see what is really important in my life – relationally, spiritually, in the context of family and work. The “before and after Karin’s death exercise” we did in therapy helped me put things into perspective again and assisted me thinking strategically in my work, and in life generally, once again.

Phys Ed Diploma / IMM diploma

When seen in the context that I failed mock Matric, but was able to pass my degree at Stellenbosch University, it speaks loudly of the defining significance of my time in Stellenbosch on my life.

I also completed and passed my IMM diploma even with the pressure of work and being a dad.

Clive’s identity

I am a focused, determined, analytical teacher and athlete. This identity, which was defined during my time at Stellenbosch University, has never changed.

BRANCHES - Dreams, goals, things you aspire to do, that would make meaning

Put Neale through university

Clive believes that as a parent he owes his children the following:

1. To help them develop a positive self image, by giving credit for what he does, make and give him the space to make decisions. Offer a safety net when he makes mistakes.
2. University education – Neale has been accepted at US to do BSc Engineering.

Retire without financial worries

Due to retrenchments I have lost income for retirement. I have high security needs and the need to provide for my family, causes me some concern.

Looking back on Karin's life with joy and happiness

As I look back on Karin's life I find so much meaning, happiness and joy. She was a person at peace with herself.

It was a life changing event for me when she was born, when I held her for the first time. This looking back and remembering her life is like a double edged sword: on the one side it brings me such joy and on the other it breaks me up.

Joy and peace in life

In this respect I am not what it should be. I find that joy and peace comes and goes.

Redo house to our taste

I have started with this dream, to make our "home" comfortable for Neale so that he will be happy to bring friends home.

For Clive, home is where he stayed with Uncle James and Aunty Yolande in Stellenbosch. "home is where my roots are":

The house in Hermanus, the "the old house" in Roger street, the new house is home, important that we redo it and make it home, done some work in the garden, build a fountain and a pond.

All the places mentioned above are significant places of meaning-making for Clive.

To know God's will for my life

What does that mean for you? To know that this is 'IT'

My relationship with God has got closer, but I would like to know what God's will is for my life.

Having a successful SMI distributorship

This is somehow linked with "IT" also, and with my need for security, joy and peace.

Travel to New Zealand

Always dreamed of going to New Zealand, it's a beautiful country, and at a time New Zealand athletes dominated middle distance running.

Go overseas with Juana

A dream for Clive, just to travel overseas with Juana

LEAVES - Significant people / relationships where you have found meaning

Uncle James and Aunt Yolande

Memories of going on holiday with them. Uncle James very significant in my life, often asked him for advice, for his opinion and I trusted his advice.

Growing up in Durban, we lived around the corner from them, and would visit often. Uncle James passed away six months before Karin. Clive still visits Yolande.

Dick Brophy / Hendrick Rabe

Neighbours, either side of Clive and Juana, in Roger street house.

Clive still visits Dick regularly – Dick's one son and his wife passed away. He remarried a few years ago.

Hendrick and Olga Rabe were like third grandparents to Karin and Neale. They spent a lot of time there. Olga even went to grandparent evenings at school with Karin and Neale.

Many special memories of meals and visiting together. It was a very loving, caring relationship of consideration for one another – they were both ideal neighbours. After Karin's accident Dick used to visit her in ICU every day and just stand at the end of her bed. Karin and Neale were very close to the Brophy's and the Rabe's.

Married to Juana

Clive and Juana have been married for 27 years (2007) and have known one another for 30 years. A special story of love at first sight. As a couple, have been through some rough times - with Juana's cancer, Clive's retrenchments and Karin's untimely death - but their love for one another has prevailed.

Karin and Neale

Both are a significant part of my life. Although Neale is closer to Juana, he is a significant in my life, cannot quantify. Relationship with Karin was different, unique – when I held Karin for the first time when she was born, this unique relationship began.

Karin telling me that she wants run middle distance, “*just like you, Dad.*”

She was 14 years old, just returned from SA championships, 6 months before her fatal accident. I had protected her from running middle distance till now, allowing her to sprint only.

What made it so significant? I was an example to her of a middle distance athlete, and she wanted to follow me out of her own. No pressure was put on her to perform in athletics; it came of its own. This memory is so clear, so vivid it could have happened yesterday.

Significant in meaning-making but also a nagging question - I wonder where she could have gone with her athletics and academics abilities?

Theuns and Alta

These are people I stayed with my second year at US. Clive was the brother Alta never had. They were very significant people in my life. Unfortunately they got divorced and Alta went off the rails. She died some years ago. Huge part of life and meaning-making of my life during those significant years at US.

Mike Witney

Long term relationship with both Clive and Juana as a friend and as their pastor. Significance and meaning-making as a result of long term pastoral care and counselling Mike just seemed to always be there for us, remember going with to make funeral arrangements, identifying Karin’s body at the State mortuary, and giving support and counselling over the past eight years.

Going to school at age five

Not ready for school, could not cope, especially with my older brother, Lawrence, being at the same school and always being compared to him: Why can’t you be as clever as your brother? Did not have an identity in junior school, was kept back in Grade 7, to adjust. Had a very negative effect on me and my identity.

Link this with the alternative story of the time at US where I found identity, found significance and passed academically, not to mention excelling at athletics.

Digby Stanley / Len Paverley / Div Lambrecht

Three men who had profound significance in my athletics career.

Digby was my Physical Ed teacher in High school in Durban. He told me that he could not help me with my athletics; I was too good and needed to join an athletic club.

Len was the coach at the athletics club in Durban, who encouraged me and prepared me for what happened at US.

Div was my athletics coach at US – help defined me as a Springbok middle distance athlete.

FRUITS - Achievements that have made meaning in your life

Norwich Annual Reports

While working for Ad agency that had almost lost the Norwich account, I took the account over, and they were able to keep the account.

The MD of Norwich wrote a letter to say that he had never worked with such a jacked-up guy ever.

Norwich Account

The pressure of having ad campaigns ready each week while Norwich was main sponsor of WP rugby. I set up a briefing procedure that became the standard for briefing procedures for the AD agency. I received a trophy from Norwich with following inscription “The man behind the team, behind the team.” My time working with Norwich account was a defining period in my career.

“IT” comes up many times in Clive’s stories, “IT” seems very important to him, he is not always able to define “IT”. But “IT” is about getting it right, achieving at the highest level, linked with success in athletics. The need to be within the top group of performers, if not the top.

Daikin Account

Happened in 2003, I received an order for 20 programs, largest single order in 20 years of SMI in SA.

At this time the symptom of guilt after receiving an order had not yet appeared, it seem to appear after the “ambush grief episode” on the hockey field.

Rapid promotion at Media coordination

First job in media and advertising after teaching. I received a salary increase after six months and enjoyed rapid promotion in management. I attribute this to my ability to see through the clutter.

Castle Wine

Very successful, became the benchmark of how to run an account.

Wines of SA

Given the challenge of developing an advertising pitch for promoting wines in London. Went to London for a week, won the bid for the ad campaign. Best pitch they had ever seen.

Firestone & Supra Quick account

After doing the Media planning, I received a letter from Firestone to say that it was the best media proposal ever from the ad agency.

IMM Diploma

While in the media / advertising business did his IMM part time, which took tenacity, focus and hard work.

Athletic achievements – see notes on this aspect

BUGS - Problems that you face day-to-day / giants that challenge meaning-making in your life

Know I am in God's will for my life

When I drew the Tree back in September, this was a major issue in my life, since then I read the book Mike gave me on '*Knowing God's will*' which really helped.

At the end of 2002 I asked God to show me if me working for SMI was in His will.

During the time of therapy with the Tree of Meaning, the symptoms of the grief stumbling block of guilt when I closed a sale disappeared.

As God continued to work in my life, I accepted the tests and then my sales where good this year, then the cherry on the top, me receiving the SMI award at the International sales conference in Seville, Spain.

This award was for selling 200 programs – hugely significant, it was the fulfilment of the promise I made to Karin a few hours before her accident that I would be successful at SMI.

This bug has moved significantly almost to be a fruit.

Financial Security

Been a giant for the past 8 years – I have no pension and this is linked to retiring without financial worries (Branches)

I have adapted my insurance / assurance / pension portfolios

SMI prospects look good for 2008. It no longer seems to be such a giant.

A huge alternative story demonstrating the transport during therapy. All my bugs seem to have moved from mountains into molehills.

FALLEN LEAF - significant people that you have lost, these fallen leaves become nutrients for the soil. How does the meaning of fallen leaves become life giving to you / your Tree of Meaning.

When Karen died all sense of life and meaning was shattered, but during the Tree of Meaning exercise the following memories relating to Karin as a fallen leaf, assisted me with meaning-making:

Roger Street house -- after Karen's death I lost interest in the garden and in the house;

Now we are redecorating the new house to our taste.

We have transplanted three of the roses given to us after Karin death at Roger Street at the new house.

The pinkest rose - which was a gift from Dr Serfontein on the first anniversary of Karin's death, is in a special place in the garden at the new house

Verborgensfontein Farm. This is a special place of meaning-making. I'm looking forward to going there during the December holidays, just to spend time remembering Karin in the place where we scattered her ashes.

Holding Karin for the very first time, just after she was born, my relationship with Karin was unique / different. Someone said to me that Karin was not my daughter she is your clone

The time Karin told me that she wanted to run middle-distance just like her dad, just six months before the accident.

Ambush grief - the symptom of guilt, the "so what?" feeling whenever I have closed a deal at work. The symptom appeared some months after the accident while I was sitting on the hockey field at Stellenberg High School.

Karin is my life, my hero, my role model.

Karin impacted people's lives: she was an exceptional person.

We were so alike: task orientated, to-do lists, athletic, and focused.

She was very determined; my nickname for her was "klipkop".

After I lost my job the first time I would take Karin to school and on the way to school we always parted with me saying to Karin, “I love you” and Karin answering, “I love you too.”

When she died, I felt she was broken and I couldn't fix her, felt hopeless, helpless and devastated.

My life was shattered, it felt like was carrying a rock, but the rock is getting lighter.

To look at the Tree of Meaning, I see a circle of life which is life-giving.

I write frequently in my journal. I still feel like Karin is next to me.

Not many fathers can sit and say that the child wanted to emulate them.

Karin I miss your love every day.

I still see Clive every two to three months, as he still struggles with the loss of his daughter. But, because he loitered under the Tree of Meaning, his life has meaning once again. He is able to make a contribution in his career, to his family, and in his church life.

6.2 Carien's Tree of Meaning stories

ROOTS - Family history, origins, places of meaning

Sasolburg

I was born and bred here, lived here until after Matric – good memories.

Small town then, felt safe and was free, green belts between houses, such rich memories of freedom, childhood and safety, riding our bicycles.

Carefree living in those days, beautiful town. Sasolburg won awards for being such a beautiful town.

When it became bigger, it lost its charm and small town feeling.

Life was settled here, no major changes, no moving around as I grew up.

School was dual medium, no major issues at school, but I was always more interested in horse riding than school anyway.

Tante Era

My father's stepmother, my own grandmother, died when I was very young.

We started out badly, but after Theo's birth our relationship grew. She showed me the wedding rings that she had inherited – these were very significant for her. I learnt to forgive and see people in a different light.

Grootvader (Sierk Schroder) - Mom's dad

Reputed to be undoubtedly the most important Dutch portrait painter of the twentieth century.

He grew up in the shadow of Picasso, Rembrandt and other great artists, but stayed with traditional art. He never painted off a photograph, no abstract work.

His life impacted mine with a passion for art, in some ways negatively; I am not a fine artist – there was, and still is, a comparison of my work and his to a degree. I never felt good enough.

His heritage and legacy gave me my artistic flair.

We spent significant times together; I spent "me time" with him, visiting museums and art galleries, learning about art.

He became a professor of fine art at the University of The Hague – and I have some of his original artwork.

I feel good knowing that he was my grandfather – his life gives my life meaning, as I see myself as a gifted artist, continuing the legacy Grootvader left behind. (This was a defining alternative story that was thickening during the storying.)

Tante Fransie

She was a family friend in Sasolburg – she got involved with them as a family through horse riding. I lived with them for three months while my parents were on holiday.

They had a riding school so I visited their farm regularly. I have wonderful memories of farm life with the horses.

She had a stroke when she was 40 while riding. She was a special person in my life and responsible for my passion for horses.

Wassenaar

This is the little town just outside The Hague in Netherlands, where my grandparents lived. There is so much history and so many memories for me in that little town. These wonderful rich memories flood back when I look at photographs of this house.

This house in Wassenaar is an anchor point in my life – it gives my life meaning and stability.

Ballitto

A seaside town on Natal coast, where we went on holiday most June/July school holidays.

I have fond memories of eating ice-cream, swimming and just having fun.

Bettman family

Another family from Sasolburg. I grew up with them and am still in contact with the daughter, Mayoline.

Memories of a nice home to go to, and of a homely and warm family.

Papa & Mama – my parents

A very significant relationship with my mom developed during high school. Until then, I was a daddy's girl. I helped dad with practical things. But when I was a teenager my dad travelled a lot for work, which became a huge issue in my life. I remember often seeing my mom crying. I hated my dad. It was only later in life I realised that he was doing it for me.

My dad was diagnosed with HOCM (Hypertrophic Obstructive Cardiomyopathy) when he was 63. I am a carrier of the HOCM gene. Cassie died as a result of HOCM.

There is a very small probability that Theo and Mieke could get HOCM. They are checked once a year. It is not an issue anymore in my life – somewhere I have made peace and meaning with this issue.

Tante Ina / Oom Jan

Tante Ina is my Mom's best friend. She is an amazing woman. They were my "replacement aunt and uncle" until I met my family in Holland when I was 11 years old.

Drakensberg

Went there on holiday and for horse riding lessons near the Drakensberg Boys Choir School – very rich memories.

Horse riding

Used to be a passion of mine when I was younger, but replaced by family and lack of finances. I have moved on.

Painting of mom

Done by Grootvader in a Rembrandt style during WW 11 – it has always been there on the wall in the house in Wassenaar. It holds a very significant place on my tree of meaning. I hope I will inherit the painting one day.

Frikkie Meyer Street

The street in Sasolburg where I lived, this is where my roots are in SA.

BRANCHES - Dreams, goals, things you aspire to do, that would make meaning

Game Ranger

It was a dream for me to become a game ranger with the freedom, the outdoors and my passion for animals.

A friend of mine became a game ranger, but told me that I was too stupid to become one.

This amplified the discourse in my life that started when I was a young child when a Grade 7 teacher told me that I was stupid.

I even bet a teacher once that I would not fail – and I won the bet.

(This was wonderful alternative story that we celebrated.)

Right through my life this discourse has often paralyzed me. I feel that I am going to fail before I even start. I am often defined by “you are stupid.”

I am not academic or athletically inclined; I found meaning in horse riding which started with Tanie Fransie, in Salsolberg. I became a competent horse riding teacher and I love riding and the outdoors – it is part of me.

Handling criticism

I have always struggled with criticism, especially with the discourse of being “stupid”. But over the years of working at TOURSA, I have embraced positive criticism and have found an identity that I am comfortable with.

My number 1 dream is to be a fulltime artist.

Major influence of Grootvader.

I stopped all art when Cassie died 3 years ago; I started drawing again this last weekend.

(This was a very significant step in her journey with grief.)

Art is very therapeutic for me.

I want to be comfortable with being arty – but the voices of Grootvader often “speak” and I tend to be self-critical.

My ultimate dream is to sit outside the house in Frikkie Meyer Street in Sasolberg as it was 30 years ago, and paint.

Work with animals – a very defining part of my life.

I grew up loving animals. We always had cats, dogs. I loved horses; I wanted to be a game ranger, and I just loved working on a farm.

Story of Carien being the cow whisperer in the farming community. (She could “talk” to the cows and they would no longer be agitated when they were being milked.)

Carrien resonated well with the metaphor of “being stupid” being like noise. It is always there, but sometimes it is softer, and at others it is louder. We explored this metaphor further and discovered that when she was thinking and talking about animals and art the “noise of being stupid” was softer. But “When I doubt myself or feel that I am not good enough, then the ‘noise of being stupid’ is louder.”

Cooking course

I would love to do a cooking course so that I would be able to prepare really nice, interesting meals. This is part of my creative, artistic flair.

Writing

I often have the desire to write, so that I can write stories of the images I see when I am painting: this is another expression of my creative flair.

I was diagnosed with dyslexia when I was in primary school, but I never allowed the dyslexia to define me. I worked hard.

(One cannot see any clue of the dyslexia in her now.)

School teachers often link dyslexia with being stupid. Comments by teachers became a discourse which I still struggle with today: “You are just a stupid dyslexic; you will never get it right; you will fail.”

SOIL – Significant events that shaped your life, made meaning.

Getting my first horse

My parents went overseas for three months, and, when they got back, they bought me my first horse. Another horse (called Damien) which I got later, brought Casper- my husband - and I together.

Horses are part of Casper's and my life.

School in Sasolburg

I walked to school. I remember playing "kiss catch" under the big poplar trees. My music teacher used to hit me on the knuckles, because I was "useless". Grade 4 was a tough year. I had Yellow Jaundice and spent three months in bed, and soon after that I had Glandular Fever.

In Grade 7 Mrs Marias hit us. She told me that I was dyslexic and stupid, and bet me that I would fail.

I had a strong group of friends that went right through to Grade 12 with me.

I was not good at athletics. I was always one of the last in races.

Technikon – van der Byl Park

I stayed on my own in residence. I was not happy, and so moved out after a few months to stay with a family.

I did Graphic design. This affected my art very positively. It gave me a fine eye for detail.

I have good memories of a friend called Grant.

1999 trip to Europe

My mom wanted to see the millennium in at the family house in The Hague, so the family went on the trip to Europe. We all had a wonderful experience.

We went to Spain and Holland.

This was one of the few holidays we spent together as a family.

I have memories of Cassie playing chess with Grandfather according to according to Cassie's rules.

This was the last time I saw granddad alive.

Dad travelling

This allowed me to bond with my mom.

Although I hated it when my dad was away on business, I realized that he did it for our benefit: he provided for us as a family.

When he was home he spent quality time with me and my horses.

Tante Ina's death

I refer to her in my roots. She died of cancer.

Birth of Theo, Mieke and Cassie

I loved being pregnant, and enjoy being a mom.

I was never sick during pregnancy; I just flourished when pregnant.

I have special memories of pregnancy and life with the children.

TOURSA

I joined them at the right time. The staff have been very significant in the meaning-making of my life.

Everyone there treated me as a person and as an equal.

I gained my identity and moved from "stupid" to "I can do it."

(This was very significant in Carien's story.)

All the staff cared and supported me when Cassie died.

Tanie Fransie

She was influential in the start of my journey with horses, which became such a meaningful part of me and my life.

Arab Horse Society – Rustenburg

I ran the horse show in Rustenburg, and ran the first Arab Horse show in South Africa.

This was a very positive memory and a big achievement for me. Part of the "I can do it" shift.

I started breeding Arabs, and doing horse shows with them. I sold them off when I came to an end of an era: my children were more important.

Move to George

We left Rustenburg and went to George; Casper was offered a job in a plastic factory there.

I worked at a dairy to make ends meet. This continued the legacy of the “cow whisperer”.

We stayed on a farm. Although it was a tough time, I have fond memories of our six months in George.

Cassie got Rubella and, in 1991, the doctor diagnosed Cassie with a heart murmur. Cassie saw a cardiologist, who diagnosed him with HOCM (Hypertrophic Obstructive Cardiomyopathy). So we moved to Durbanville to be near the Red Cross Hospital in Rondebosch.

Red Cross Hospital

The medical staffs are amazing people. They played a big role in my life as Cassie was very ill, and often spent a lot of time in the Red Cross Hospital.

I have memories of special times spent with Cassie.

(Carien mentioned that this was their special bonding time).

I made a decision that as we were going to spend a lot of time in waiting rooms we would make the most of it; we played cards, and just got close.

Scouts

This memory only returned when we were dealing with the fruit.

I joined Cubs so that I could be with Cassie. Even after Cassie’s death, I stayed on for two years. The scouts were all in uniform at Cassie’s funeral. I have wonderful memories of scouts. The night Cassie died, he wanted to come to Cubs with me first.

He joined in with the games and in the one game they drew an outline of Cassie on the wall. Much later, after Cassie had passed away, I saw that the Cubs had put a note on the wall that said “Don’t erase the outline.”

Cassie’s last words to me before he went to Scouts that night before he passed away, were “That was the best hamburger I have had. Mom, I love you.”

(This was a very painful and emotional, but significant memory for Carien.)

LEAVES – Significant people / relationships where you found meaning.

Patsy

She was the first person we met when we came to Durbanville. She cared for my horses on her farm. Patsy is quite a demanding person, so our relationship is up and down, but we are still in contact.

Pieter

Our neighbour at the old house and a good family friend. I prefer him to his wife, Carol, who is very demanding and is the cause of many tense moments in the relationship. Casper and Pieter had an argument. They did not talk to one another for six months. After Cassie died, they sorted things out. Pieter is Casper's only friend; they go sailing together, and are good each other.

Serina / Lukas

Lukas is a blind piano tuner. Serina had polio as a kid. She had a heart of gold. She died some years back during surgery. She was an inspiration to me: she coped and never complained. I have memories of Cassie riding around the house on her lap in a wheelchair. Cassie could not say C so he called himself Tassie, and said "Tassie kan nie K sê nie."

Lukas is still a friend and a support to us. He is remarried to a schoolteacher.

Gillian

She was a mentor to me at AECl. She is Jewish lady who ate bacon and eggs. She often said to me "You can do it". She encouraged me in graphic design, photography and in writing. Through her I gained confidence and was able to interview people and write articles. She was very significant in my life. She gave me meaning through telling me that "You can" when "You can't" defined me.

Hugh and Christine

Hugh was a friend of my sister, Marie. He and Christine became friends of my parents. They travelled with my parents. Hugh became very significant in my mom's life. Their son, Stephen, was born at the same time as Cassie, so when I see him, many memories flood back. I sat at Hugh's table on his 40th birthday and he introduced me as his "other wife". He is a very significant person in my life: someone I can phone when I am in trouble. He became dad and mom to Theo when he was in Johannesburg.

Grant

He helped me through my hard times at college. He was my pal during those years; he was a special friend, but it was a plutonic relationship.

Moens and Anne

These are new friends. I met them through yachting. They are currently sailing around the world. The friendship with them is like a breath of fresh air.

Dr John Lawrence: Cardiologist at the Red Cross Hospital

He played a key role in Cassie and my life. He loves his job and his patients. I visited him after Cassie's death. (*Carien was very emotional at the time.*)

Cassie loved Dr L. He had a little doctor's case and he would listen to other children's hearts.

Randell Carr

He trained my mom on computers, and became a friend of my parents. He was involved in a bad motor vehicle accident which crippled him and he lost his wife in the accident. He is a special friend. He drove Mieke to her Matric dance; he is like a brother to me.

Gerry

A Dutch friend. We met through my parents some 22 years ago in Secunda. She would be my crutch when Cassie was ill. I can share my hurts and pains with her - stuff I couldn't share with Casper.

Jennifer

Gerry's sister in law. She is very different. She is one of these people who wants to save the world, and is very community orientated. We are very close; we always do Christmas together. She's almost like family.

Hilda

A work friend. I am amazed at what she has achieved at work in the last two years. I admire her and she has given me confidence.

Ed Koopman

He worked for Sasol, and has been a friend for a long time. We met through my parents. He has always wanted to marry me.

He is married to a local girl. He is a typical Dutchman. He has a good marriage with two children. He is very much part of our attached family.

Casper

I will deal with Casper later, under bugs.

Theo, Mieke and Cassie

My three children.

(We discussed the issue of whether Carien has two or three children. I agree with her: she has three children. Cassie is still part of the family and will always be. This is part of remembering.)

Mom

(Carien is very close to her mom. They have a very special relationship. Her mom is very significant in her life, and is part of her support structure.)

Marilyn

Old school friend since Grade 2. We chat occasionally; she is still part of family. She has achieved well in life. She is Michael de Beer's (Hilda's husband) boss, and is very down to earth.

Marta

She is a leaf on my tree, because she has influenced my life - but negatively. She did however make me realise that “I can choose not to be” which is positive for me.

Wikus

Another blind piano tuner friend. We met in Rustenburg. He supported me when I needed a job. We have lost contact.

Saskia

We grew up together; she has a very good relationship with my mom. She has had many losses in her life, including two husbands. She is very musical and has a very good relationship with Mike. She was very supportive of me when Cassie died. Her third husband, Rob, had a fall out with my dad. He pushed my dad into the garden in his wheelchair and left him there until he was fetched. It caused a lot of pain in the family. Caused me pain for my mom and how they handled my dad.

Themes and reflections:

Most of her friendships are made through horses, yachts and her parents.

Friendships are very significant and important to Carien. She has a wonderful “Club of Life” around her.

FRUITS – Achievements that have made meaning

Craft market at Durbanville

I have always done crafts for myself - like painting and beading. We made beaded angels and stars for Christmas. We stopped due to time pressure with work, family and Scouts.

I feel that it was a personal achievement that I sold stuff that I had made, and I was able to teach people how to make it. I was the one with the knowledge and skills. This linked with “I can”.

Going back to work at TOURSA

I have been at home for fifteen years doing crafts and stuff to make ends meet. Through Desline I moved through various areas of work at TOURSA and grew to where I am now. I used to think that I could never do what the consultants do and now I can do it.

(Transport from “I can’t” to “I can”).

Overcoming the fear of answering the phone

I use the phone a lot, and speak to clients all over the world. In the past I could not even answer the phone: I was defined by “I can’t”. It took a lot of self talk to be able to answer the phone. I am very sensitive to the tone of voice, especially where folk are aggressive or if there is conflict... Michelle taught me to “kill them with kindness.”

Dairy

I am proud that I could run an entire dairy. I was responsible for the farm and it kept me sane when we as a family had lost everything. This was a huge achievement for me: another counter plot to “I can’t” by shifting to “I can”.

(Wonderful “sparkling memory” of the cow whisperer.)

Diploma and certificate

I graduated with a diploma in Graphic design and a certificate in photography. I still struggle with the memory of a friend saying to me that I was “stupid” and “I can’t.”

This memory just intensifies the memory of Mrs Marais in Grade 7 telling me that I was dyslexic and stupid. I achieved at college and I found meaning in my creative side, another “I can” event.

Getting married

Maybe it should not be on the tree as fruit. Maybe the fruit and the meaning-making are more about “staying married”. I am starting to realise that my marriage can change. Casper is starting to say “I love you” in practical ways; maybe this is his love language.

Being there for mom

This gives my life meaning and is important for me. I try not to be judgmental of her and to be there for her when she needs to talk. Mom is a special person and I enjoy being there for her.

BUGS – Problems that you face day-to-day / giants that challenge meaning-making in your life

'Gou-gou': obsessively driven by activity.

Throughout our marriage, Casper has always said “Kom ons gaan daar gou-gou”; he is always in a rush.

If I go out I will say “ek gaan gou-gou winkel toe” and then I would rush to get home, because Casper would moan at me if I took too long.

This has become a conditioned response.

(Through the ongoing therapy, “gou-gou” has been effectively externalised. Carien has become aware and now we are working on her becoming more empowered concerning “gou-gou”).

The other day Casper said I did not need to rush. This was the first time in our marriage that I felt relaxed. I did not rush, or become anxious in the traffic.

I went shopping and enjoyed it.

I also don't say “gou-gou” anymore; I found this softens gou-gou's voice.

Casper

Casper is not the bug, but rather some of his traits bug me: like jealousy and not accepting his family.

He doesn't seem to know how to express his emotions, or express love. He tends to say “Thank you” or “I love you” by doing things.

During our journey these bugs have got smaller.

God talk

When I got married I made promises before God: divorce isn't an option.

(When someone gave Carien some money for staying with her, she said "God is so good.")

Sparkling moments

When I came home and Casper had cleaned the whole house for the first time in our marriage.

When Casper invited me to come and do some gardening with him.

When Casper gave me permission not to rush: no more "gou-gou".

When a client at work told Carien on the phone that she can "hear Carien smile" on the phone. *(Notice the transport that has taken place from the position of fear of answering the phone.)*

FALLEN LEAF

It will be the 7th anniversary of Cassie's death on 22nd September 2010.

I have become more at peace over the past few years, but I have not given any of Cassie possessions away yet. I will one day, but when I am ready.

Our recent trip to Holland brought back many memories of Cassie, but they are different now. They are not so painful.

I was able to celebrate Cassie's 16th birthday last year. It gets easier. The only thing I really struggle with is seeing friends of Cassie, and then start to wonder, what would Cassie look like now, what would he be doing? This is still is very painful.

A big step for me in my grief journey is accepting that he is no longer here, and he will not be coming back.

I visit Cassie's memorial stone when I feel like it; I just spend time there remembering him, looking at his memorial stone with little cars on it. I also like to visit other children's memorials that are around Cassie's. This is one of my special rituals.

I seem to have blocked out all the memories of the week Cassie died. I only remember his memorial service. Memories of Graham, a friend and Cassie's Scout master, saying "Cassie never wanted to be a lamb" linked to the story that Cassie always wanted to be bigger and better than his brother Theo. When Mieke started doing practical work at Red Cross Hospital as a Social worker student, this was very significant for me. It is like Mieke is back at Red Cross on my behalf and will also benefit like Cassie and I did. Another significant thing for me is that I always speak of Cassie in the present tense; and when people ask how many children I have I say three - Theo, Mieke and Cassie.

Photograph a self portrait of Carien. This is a very significant document. It speaks of Carien's preferred identity; how she has made meaning of death and is comfortable with it; and how the metaphor of trees is so significant in her life, and in her journey with grief.



The elements in the portrait: Depicts me as I see myself now. I am happy with this person most of the time. The cross is my connection to death: it's final. The tree depicts my love for trees: they are stable, unique and can change, as I see how I have grown over the past seven years.

6.3 Riana's Tree of Meaning stories

ROOTS - Family history, origins, places of meaning

Sasolburg

My best memories that make meaning in my life are rich memories of Ouma, memories of my childhood and the road we lived in - Warden Street. Most of my friends were of a similar age. We played in the street, or at friends' homes. My dad was very strict, "jy mag nie dit nie"; no high heel shoes, no makeup, etc. My friends' parents were more open: we were allowed to be just kids and play. Very happy memories from when I can remember to when I was 15 years old. Although I was born in Frankfurt, Sasolburg is where my roots are most deep. I have memories of playing doctor, nurse, taking our dolls into town in their prams. Playing piano, playing marbles, racing Scalectrix, riding our bicycles. Safe, friendly. During the holidays I would be with friends all day.

When I smell petrol, so many good, warm, special memories of Sasolburg flood back. I link that smell to the smell of the plants in the green belts we played in. I remember the clean smell of wooden floors in the house.

Went to the AGS church - very happy - and that's where I gave my life to the Lord when I was young. I have many fond memories of youth camps.

(Theme of freedom and safety in memories of Sasolburg).

Brothers

Johan: he is 48 years old lives in Pretoria.

He is a very deep, quiet person, and doesn't say much. I have very good memories of us playing together; I also have a good relationship with Anton.

Anton: he is 47 years old lives in Saudi Arabia.

My relationship with Anton is very close; he brings back a lot of childhood memories for me.

My mom said that he was gay from the day he was born; and had no relationship with my dad. I can remember my dad using his belt on all of us.

Anton is always there for me; he brings so much meaning into my life, gives me such support, especially emotional support.

Ma

My mom: she lives in White River in a retirement village. We get on very well. She has a lot of wisdom; she knows me well and gives me good, sound advice. Since Gianni died, we have become even closer; we speak on the phone almost every day. There was a time when our relationship was strained. This was during my rebellious phase, when we moved to White River. She has a special place in my life as she - and not my dad - was always the pillar of strength in our family.

Dad

He passed away when I was 21 years old. It was very tough as my relationship with Gianni was in a bad place at the time too. He worked in a tyre business, but nothing was ever right in his eyes. He and my mom did not have a happy marriage and we discovered after he died that he was in love with another person throughout his marriage.

It seemed like there was always another woman in our family. There was a similar story in my marriage with Gianni. There seemed to be another woman in our marriage all the time. This made me feel insecure - not good enough - and I always tried to protect the children.

Alternative storyline: I have a good memory of waking up in the morning and heard my dad saying his prayers.

(We thickened this story of a praying dad.)

Riana shared this with her mom, as she too is re-storying the memory of a praying husband, and this has helped her with a “relationship” with her memories of her husband. *(The ripple effect of taking stories back.)*

Oupa and Ouma

Part of my Sasolburg story. My ouma's house was a safe place for me. It was near school - warm and safe. My grandparents were always there for me, and they accepted me. The memory of fresh homemade bread. This memory of Ouma's house being safe and her being an amazing Christian is contrasted with her own home being unsafe: there was no love and affection shown by parents, and there was a lot of fighting.

Port Elizabeth

My dad's family live in Port Elizabeth. Every December holiday we went there. I have fond memories of sitting and chatting to Tanie Johanna. I am still in contact with the two brothers - Danie and Manie - and have memories of them in the hippy days, taking us for a ride in their "beach buggies" with flowers painted on them.

Ouma Katrina

My dad's mom. I have good memories of her. She used to make each of us our own little milk tart and soetkoekies when we visited.

I still love Port Elizabeth; it was like home, similar to Sasolburg.

Oom Laan

My father's friend in Frankfurt. As a child we would often visit as a family. When I was seven years old he became very loving and wanted to hug and touch me. I had to lie in bed with him on a Sunday morning while my mom made breakfast. The sexual abuse went on for a while - inappropriate touching - and then he would give me money so that I would not tell. From then on I was always searching for love and affection.

Alternative story of Gianni: I never disclosed regarding the abuse until about four years after I married Gianni. Soon after having Hugo I told Gianni. He was so understanding and supportive: this strengthened our relationship.

I really believe that the disclosure to Gianni and speaking to others regarding the abuse was very therapeutic. Amazing healing story of God's grace. (*This also speaks so powerfully of the potential healing of disclosure and breaking the power of silence*).

Vaal Technikon

I went to study Food and Clothing Technology, and then changed to secretarial course in my second year. I met Gianni there. He was studying Mechanical Engineering. It was love at first sight, four months into my first year. I have memories of a great social life; "sokkies", going to the Spur and Christian get togethers at the AGS church.

I was attracted to Gianni by his Italian looks, his love for music, and his love for people. I remember meeting his parents for the first time; they lived in Alberton at the time. My visit to "Vensters" at Stellenbosch University recently caused many memories to flood back.

Ballito

Once Gianni and I were married, we went to Ballito for most weekends. I have a very special relationship with Hugo and Marie - Gianni's parents. Once the children were born, we spent most holidays there. I have warm memories of being spoilt, an open house - warm, loving, caring - I could relax there. Memories of the children going to the beach.

Witrivier

I remember this being my rebellious teenager time. I had to move from my friends, and the safety and comfort of Sasolburg. I started smoking and drinking in Grade 9. It was new environment and I had the nickname of Spooky. My mom still lives in Witrivier and I enjoy going back, connecting with old friends. During this time, I felt like I had moved away from God, as I was rebellious and forced to go to church. In Grade 11, I started getting my life back on track.

Boksburg

We settled there after we got married and lived there for ten years. It was our first home together; both Hugo and Christina were born in Boksburg. We built many friendships, attended St Matthew's church. Both children were christened there. We moved from Boksburg to Cape Town.

Europe and the United Kingdom

Gianni and I had our honeymoon in Italy and I have wonderful memories of UK and Europe with Gianni. In Rome we met Gianni's family, spending time in St Peter's square, just trying to understand Catholicism.

Hugo, Christina and I went back to the UK last year. It was "ouch" - very emotional, but although it was painful I needed to start dealing with "the pain", but still have good memories. Gianni was not there but all the good memories with him stay with me.

Zimbabwe

My friend Carol lives there, just outside Harare. Our friendship goes back to Vaal Technikon days. Our relationship continued and, after Gianni and I got married, we visited her. Another safe place in my life.

I went there the first Christmas after Gianni died; it was the right place for us, during that first Christmas.

SOIL - Significant events that shaped your life, made meaning

Meeting and falling in love with Gianni

It was love at first sight. We met at a student Christian camp in Vereeniging, and we were sitting at a camp fire together. I was attracted to his "Italian looks". After the camp he broke up with his girlfriend and we started dating.

Gianni spoilt me: we had meals together; romance; knocking on my window at residence; and we had a special whistle, so we could "call" one another, which we used throughout our marriage. We spent a lot of time together, just talking, having picnics together, and getting to know one another. We often went home to his folks, Hugo and Marie.

Marriage to Gianni

When we got engaged, it was a total surprise. I designed the ring and Gianni had it made. My dad adored Gianni. He could do nothing wrong in my dad's eyes. Gianni had a better relationship with my dad than I did.

We were engaged for a while and then Gianni said that he was not sure between me and another girlfriend, Sue. So he drove down to Cape Town to see Sue. While he was in Cape Town, my dad was killed in a tractor accident. Gianni drove back to White River for the funeral. We spent the whole night talking through issues. At the funeral Gianni "promised my dad that he would look after me." We got re-engaged in the March, and got married in the June. Our house in Boksburg was built and we moved in.

Falling pregnant and having both children.

We struggled to fall pregnant with Hugo. I was put on medication, and Hugo was born in May. He was a very special boy in the Testa family: the first grandchild and a boy, named after his grandfather. I fell pregnant with Christina and Gianni said it was a girl from day one. Gianni was not a very hands on dad. He travelled a lot. I brought the children up. Gianni spoilt them materially, and he was a good provider.

Becoming a Christian

I gave my life to the Lord at an Easter camp in Kroonstad when I was twelve. A very significant event in my life.

Being baptised

Mike Witney baptised me, in spite of my mortal fear of water. Mike prayed for me and Judie was there when I came out of the water. It was a very special and significant day for me.

TRUNK - Skills, talents, spiritual gifts, and training.

Matriculated

I matriculated at White River High School in 1982. I enjoyed Matric; I got my life together during Grades 11 and 12. I stopped the rebellious phase, got serious about my walk with the Lord again, split away from the friendship group that had a bad influence on me. My Matric year was important and meaningful for me as both my parents did not have a Matric.

Good Mom

For me, being a good mom is to be caring and loving towards my children. This was very important as Gianni was an absent dad, due to work. I often just survived as a mom, as I brought the children up like a single parent. I did get a lot of good parenting input from my mom. I did not always call myself a good mom. When I was younger my children often got hidings; then I saw my sister spanking her children and I decided that there had to be other ways of discipline. Discipline does not equal corporal punishment. I see myself as a good mom, most of the time.

Kinding

A new narrative word meaning “seeing yourself as being kind and other orientated”. I love reaching out to people, being loving, kind and caring. I learnt this through my relationship with my Ouma.

Being Hospitable

The spiritual gift of hospitality. I enjoy taking care of people and having a house full of people. Gianni also liked entertaining as long as they were people he knew. I am able to create that environment where fellowship happens.

(As a guest, I have experienced this hospitality; one always feels comfortable cared for and loved in her home.)

Vaal Technikon

I received a certificate in secretarial administration; I therefore had a tertiary education. This is meaningful in my life especially in view of the fact that my parents never had the advantage of tertiary education.

Sewing

I was exposed to a lot of sewing and gained this passion during my first year Technikon when I studied food and clothing technology. I lost my love of sewing when my friend, Petra, committed suicide, as we always did sewing together. I just lost the passion. I've never picked it up again. This is something that I need to start thinking about as I journey with new meanings in my life.

Loving

I love people, and I am at my very best when I have people around me. This links with my gift of hospitality. Anton describes me as a positive, loving person. (*This is another one of those positive voices in Riana's life.*)

Serving

All the gifts of serving, loving, hospitality and 'kinding' linked up, as I have a servant heart. (*This gift was socially constructed in Riana's relationship with my Ouma and my mom.*)

Trustworthy

Trustworthiness is very important to me. This is linked with confidentiality. My trust was broken with Gianni's "other woman" issues.

Self-esteem

I redefined my self-esteem much later in my life. Gianni was a very charismatic man so I tended to live in his shadow. My self-esteem started coming back after Gianni passed away. I am starting to feel comfortable with Riana.

Conversations around the discourses Riana has come across in her grief journey and remembering practices which have been helpful in her journey with grief.

Discourses she was aware of:

You don't cry at the funeral

Men don't cry.

The stages of grief in the Kubler Ross model.

Memories of things that really helped me after Gianni's death:

Mike and Anton went with me to Doves funeral home to do the funeral arrangements and to choose the coffin. It was more of a ritual, and Doves is no longer an anxious place for me.

The memorial service was a time for me to honour memories of Gianni; it was very special to have photographs, his guitar, teddy bears and candles on the table in front of the church.

I asked Sue Schmitz to play the piano. This was very special as she grew up with us. It was honouring of Gianni's memory.

Linda (the other woman) and her husband were at the memorial service. After the service I told them that I had closed the chapter on this story. When I think of Linda I pray for her.

Treverton High School in Mooi River - it was the high school Gianni attended. He did Matric twice because he enjoyed school so much. His ashes were buried in the memorial wall. Hugo (snr), Marie and I placed letters along with the ashes in the wall. It was very significant for me: it was my last love letter to Gianni.

LEAVES - Significant people / relationships where you have found meaning

Mike and Judie

Judie and I worked together at TOURSA. Our friendship grew even closer during Michelle's illness and after she passed away.

Mike and Judie just seemed to always be there for me. Mike and Judie went to the Police station with me. Mike shared the news with me that Gianni had been killed. Mike went with Anton and me to Doves to make all the funeral arrangements.

Mike and Judie ran GriefShare, which I attended; it was a wonderful support for me and assisted me in my journey with grief.

Mike and Judie just pop in when it's a birthday or an anniversary. They are just always there for me. I have been in counselling with Mike for a long time and now I am a co-researcher for his thesis.

Anton

My pillar of strength, support and direction; he always gives me solid advice. He understands me, especially because he is in touch with his feminine side and never judges. Anton is one of the most significant people in my life. He knows me well, and he wants the best for me. I still remember the day when Mike and Anton went to Doves with me to make the funeral arrangements.

It took the fear out of it; it was a meaningful visit. I no longer fear funeral homes, like Doves.

Ester

We met in Boksburg; she was my neighbour. A tiny person, very hard working and not very feminine. She is a true friend: no grey, just black and white. She and her family moved to Durbanville some years back. We are still friends and she is very protective over me. She will do anything for me, to protect me.

Hugo (Pa) and Marie (Moeki)

They play a major role in our relationship. (*Riana still speaks of her relationship with Gianni in the present tense*). Pa just accepted me from day one. He made me feel at home. Their home became my second home.

Ouma

She lived down the road from us in Sasolburg. I would pop in after school on my bicycle, and would end up staying all afternoon. Ouma was a small woman with a humped back, but she was a remarkable woman. She looked after her grandchildren, and brought up twelve children of her own. Finances were always tough; she used hand-me-down clothes. Her love for the Lord was amazing. I always remember her Bible that was so well read. She demonstrated such humility as she cared for others.

Susan

We were at High School together in White River. We reconnected our friendship in 2008 on Facebook after 25 years. She lives in Oudshoorn and comes down to Cape Town to visit me. She is one of my friends from the past that I have reconnected with since Gianni's death.

Judy and Claude

Claude is in ministry. We met through Gianni back in Boksburg. Judy is an amazing, godly woman. She played a very significant role in my spiritual life. We supported them financially for a while. They live in Cape Town; I see them often. They have four children and their one daughter stayed with us when she was at College. I can speak to Judy about anything; she always gives me godly advice, but never judges.

Caro

We have been friends since Tech days she lives in Zimbabwe now. I spent our first Christmas without Gianni with her. We shared wonderful, good memories of Gianni and I doing "road trips" to visit her. She is a special friend; I have just spent a week with her up in Natal. Our friendship just picks up where we left off; we just laugh and enjoy one another's company.

Obies and Jeanette

We met through Christina's marine fish in the pet shop in Durbanville. We have developed a wonderful relationship. This is one of my new relationships since Gianni's death. Obies is a wonderful male role model for Christina and Hugo; he assists me as a friend and also with all sorts of mechanical stuff.

Christina

Mother's angel. Since Gianni passed away our relationship has changed. We are much closer and supportive of one another. She is very protective of me, and is very mature for her age. She doesn't do silly things. She fills a space in my life that I could not do without.

She is a child that I can trust and, since birth, she has been a special gift from God. She is Gianni's sister, Sylvia's, favourite.

Hugo

Since Gianni's death the dynamics of our relationship have changed. I used to have to protect him from Gianni. From Gianni's perspective, whatever Hugo did was never good enough. He is Marie's favourite. As the first grandson in the Testa family, he received his grandfather's name - Hugo.

His second name comes from the town - Lugi - in Italy where the Testas originate from. Hugo knows who he is: he accepts his difference (alternative dress code etc) and is self assured.

Mev Minnie

She was my Grade 1 teacher. She had such an impact on my life. She was a loving teacher with a passion for her children. She lived close to us in Sasolburg. I used to go and play at her house sometimes after school and feed her tortoises. Her son taught me in Grade 4.

I remember the musty, sweet smell of the cupboard in her kitchen where she kept the sweets. This is another one of my safe, warm and happy places.

Johan Botis

He was my youth leader in Sasolburg. He had a huge impact on my spiritual life. He always made an effort; he fetched us for youth and visited us at our homes. I can remember him taking us on a survival hike; we just took woks, no other utensils etc.

Ilse

A friend from Sasolburg for as long as I can remember. She lived in a house behind us and I was always there. They had a little “rondawel” in their yard. This was our play room. We would play with our dolls and take them with us shopping. I was the other child in the family. I would go on holiday with them. She is my ‘meitjie’; we were inseparable.

Deslyn

I met her at TOURSA. She is the kind of person that just climbs into your heart. She has been such a wonderful support to me. She has a clear mind and is very pragmatic and has been a huge help since Gianni passed away. We don't see one another often enough, but we are still close.

Petru

Another friend from Boksburg days. We met through church. She was very creative and a perfectionist. She had a huge impact in many areas of my life, especially during those early years of marriage. She committed suicide about ten years ago. She had been sexually abused. Her husband could not accept the abuse and its effects when she disclosed to him. She medicated herself on pain medication and became addicted.

She became more and more depressed until she just ended her life. This was a terrible loss for me. I connected with Petru's daughter, Natalie, and I am like her other mom.

Sue Schmitz

I got to know Sue through Gianni. She and Gianni had a relationship. When we moved to Cape Town, we re-connected; she and Ronnie were on the praise and worship team with Gianni at CESA church. Sue played the piano at Gianni's memorial service. Our friendship tends to pick up just where we left off.

BRANCHES - Dreams, goals, things you aspire to do, that would make meaning.

Children to be happy and have a relationship with God and find themselves.

(One can see Riana's value system in these words – happiness and finding yourself are linked with having a relationship with God. Although Riana did not pick this up, we did have a conversation about this).

Both Hugo and Christina made a first time commitment to God some years ago. But as they have grown up, their church (CESA) did not cater for teenagers. They have strayed a bit, but Riana holds onto the hope that they will come back to their faith one day.

To be financially stable

When asked what that would look like Riana responded: to have no concerns for tomorrow or how I am to live daily without digging into my savings.

To be a good, loving mother.

At the time when we drew the tree, this was an issue. But as we have been on this journey of self discovery, I feel that I am a good, loving mom, or certainly try to be.

To care for the elderly and babies.

Something I am still aspiring to do when I am in a better place emotionally.

Keep my faith

I have just realised that I am keeping my faith. When asked “What has allowed your faith to grow?” She said, “As I have found myself, seen the bigger picture of life and made some meaning of my life, I have grown.”

Relationship with a godly man and marriage.

FRUIT - Achievements that have made meaning in your life.

The realisation that I am “fearfully and wonderfully made”. Psalm 139:14: “*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*”

BUGS - Problems that you face day-to-day / giants that challenge meaning-making in your life.

There are no bugs in my life. I live each day for God and He sustains me. His grace is sufficient for me.

FALLEN LEAVES - significant people you have lost. The fallen leaves become nutrients for the soil. How does the meaning of fallen leaves become life giving to you and your tree of meaning?

Petru

We had a very close friendship. She was very creative and a perfectionist. She has had a huge impact in many areas of my life, especially those early years of marriage. She committed suicide about ten years ago. She left a rich creative legacy behind. I have promised myself to reconnect with my creative side that Petru got me in touch with again, when my life doesn't seem so busy. Petru as a fallen leaf in my life has enriched my life with my relationship with her daughter Natalie. We speak weekly and have a mother/daughter relationship – a very life giving relationship for both of us.

Michelle Hann

She was a friend, then a colleague when I joined TOURSA. TOURSA was a wonderful, safe working environment where women found meaning, identity and friendships. The company had a special ethos which touched women's lives. Michelle always demonstrated a Christ-like testimony, and, although she had a mind of her own, she was always mindful of others. I remember the story of her feeding and providing for the three little street children. The one, Byron, is still at school; his life was changed because Michelle cared. I could always speak openly to her, especially when my life was in crisis. Her life still influences my life.

She was non-judging, and always displayed a Christ-like attitude. Her legacy still lives on in my life through the friendships that I made while at TOURSA and in the Tourism industry. Although she is a fallen leaf, my life is enriched and is still being enriched by knowing her.

PA

My relationship with my dad has changed completely during my journey with the Tree of meaning. I see him now as a man of God, a man of prayer.

He has left behind a legacy of faith and trust. I moved from "hatred to love" in my relationship with my dad. I look at him through different eyes. I see him now with love. See the contrast of the unique outcome with dad in the Roots of my tree.

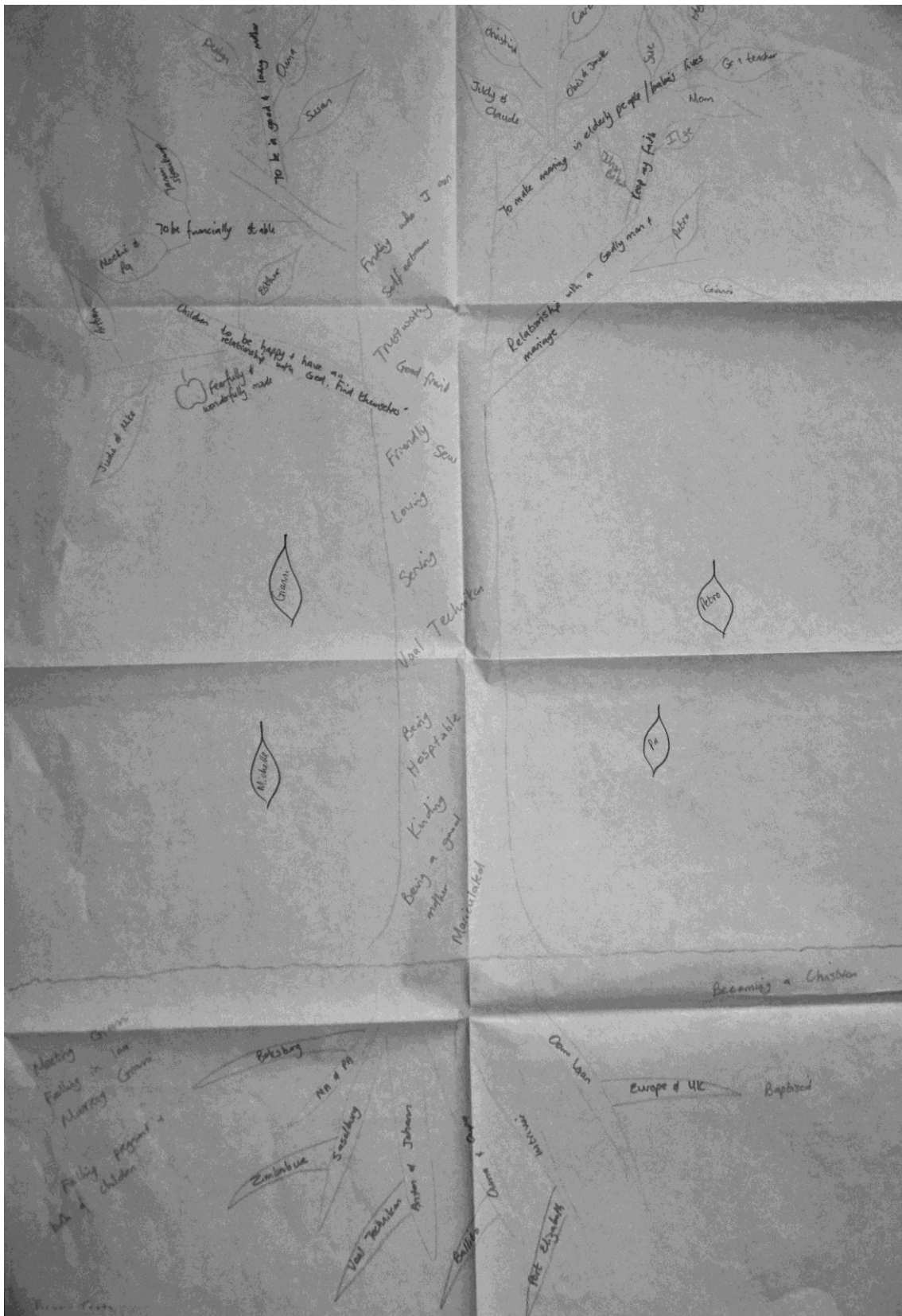
Gianni

During my journey with the Tree of meaning my life has made new meaning. I have moved from a place of feeling empty to feeling full, especially when I realize that Gianni's death was all in God's perfect plan, and more especially, when one looks at our difficulties just before his death.

My relationship with God has changed; it has become more real and much deeper. My relationship with my children is also different: it is deeper, more intimate, more meaningful, connecting, and life giving.

The Tree of meaning exercise has allowed good, rich memories to overtake the bad ones. I am able to describe both Gianni's life and my own and our relationship with much richer stories now, as I remember our meeting, our dating, our wedding, our many trips together and our shared lives. One realises the impact of memory in our meaning-making of our lives, especially when making new meanings. Even the intrusive nature of my memory when I see a white Toyota Hilux bakkie, is no longer an issue. I can have conversations with Gianni in my memory and they are rich, meaningful and good.

Riana's Tree of Meaning



6.4 Forest of Meaning

6.4.1 Introduction

In the original Tree of Life work done by Ncazelo Ncube, the participants placed all the Trees of Life on the wall to form a Forest of Life. This facilitated conversations regarding their individual Trees in a group context.

I used the Definitional Ceremony metaphor as a platform for my co-researchers. Like Ncube's group, they placed their Trees of Meaning on the wall, to facilitate our conversations and storytelling.

Michael White describes the definitional ceremony metaphor as a ceremony that structures the therapeutic arena as a context for the rich description of people's lives, identities and relationships. In this therapeutic arena, people are provided with the option of telling and/or performing the stories of their lives before an audience of outsider witnesses.

This work was drawn from the work of Barbara Myerhoff (1982), a cultural anthropologist. Michael White developed therapeutic applications for this metaphor.

I chose the definitional ceremony metaphor to facilitate the Forest of Meaning exercise for the following reasons:

- It facilitates multi-layered tellings and re-tellings of the stories of people's lives, thereby allowing many alternative themes or counter-plots of people's lives to be thickened. The stories of people's lives - particularly the stories from their Trees of Meaning - thus become linked both through these themes and through the values, purposes, and commitments expressed through them.

- The retellings of definitional ceremony structures are authenticating of people's preferred claims about their lives and their identities: they push forward the counter-plots of people's lives. They contribute to options for action in people's lives that would not otherwise be available to them.
- The definitional ceremony 'moves' all of the participants in that it contributes to options for them to become other than who they once were. They are moved in the sense of being transported: moved elsewhere in life on account of this participation.

In the context of this dissertation, the tellings and re-tellings in the definitional ceremony opens up conversations, themes and alternative stories to the co-researcher's "grief saturated stories" thereby facilitating agency and transport in their lives (White 2007: 264).

6.4.2 "Forest of Meaning" – Definitional Ceremony

I met with my three co-researchers in my lounge at home and, after introducing them to one another, they pasted their Trees of Meaning on the wall.

We discussed confidentiality boundaries and agreed that if anyone felt uncomfortable with any conversation or content they could say so; we would not go any further with that conversation and it would not be part of the research.

I explained the concept of a definitional ceremony. I outlined how the morning would proceed, and how it would end with lighting candles in memory of our loved ones who have died. We would then enjoy tea and fellowship together, as a celebration of our journey together as we loitered under the Tree of Meaning.

The co-researchers agreed that I could tape the interviews to facilitate accuracy of the telling and re-tellings.

Carien (C) accepted to be the person I interviewed; Clive (Cl) and Riana (R) were the outsider witnesses. Mike (M) Interviewer.

M: When you think of the experience of loitering under the Tree of Meaning, and of relating back stories that necessitated tapping into memory, how was that for you?

C: For me it was an amazing experience, because since Cassie died I have tended to cut off the past. When I was drawing the Tree of Meaning and relating stories, you never told me what to write; you just allowed me to talk - to tell and re – tell my stories. These memories flooded back. Now I am able to make sense (meaning) of many things from my past and to see how I have grown.

M: When we started the Tree of Life exercise, you drew the tree and said that you did not know how you were going to do this because you do not have many memories. Did this change, and in what way?

C: In the session we had, you did not extract stuff, but I was able to be in a zone where the memories just came flooding back. There were things that came back that I had long forgotten or maybe did not want to remember.

Remembering became easier each session and I was able to put the people, the places and the memories onto the Tree. The one thing that took a long time to come back in my memory was the Scouts.

We never discussed them until much later in our sessions, even though they were such a big part of our lives. I had really “forgotten” about the Scouts because those memories were so intense.

But you never prompted; you allowed the memory to come up when I was ready.

The journey has been amazing, because as I look at my Tree and see the people, the places and the things in my life,

I realize that so much of my life still has meaning. I have been able to remember so much of my life, including the past four years since Cassie died. And the remembering, in the most part, has been good.

M: Riana and Clive, is there anything that C has said that you resonate with?

R: Yes, I have also been able to remember so many rich memories from my life, even memories I have blocked out. It has been good to go back, to reconnect with my past, and to be able to have perspective again, even without Gianni.

Cl: When a loved one dies, you feel overwhelmed in all areas of life: everything else just disappears and the grief just consumes you. I found that using the Tree put everything into context, everything from your childhood days.

Everything gets put into a context, and becomes part of a whole picture. Things and people that I had long forgotten about and taken for granted are actually very significant.

C: I found that the loss of Cassie was all consuming. I found that I almost started thriving on the loss, because it is so intense. Through the Tree metaphor, I realised, that there is more about me than the loss, and that's good - it's not all bad.

C: The Tree metaphor also allows one to pace oneself. I never felt pressured to talk about anything until I was ready. I could not talk about the fallen leaf which represents Cassie for almost nine months. When I returned from my recent trip to Holland, I was ready.

While I was in Holland, many of my memories of my grandparents and my roots were thickened and now I was able to talk about Cassie's death.

M: How did you experience the therapy as I tried not to lead the conversations, to remain de-centred, and in a non-knowing position?

- C:** I can remember on many occasions we were sitting in your office and my focus was on the Tree. To be quite honest, I cannot remember what you said. I just found that as I shared stories, prompted by the things I had written on the tree, other memories emerged. It is almost as if the Tree evoked memories of my past, some of which I had buried.
- CI:** I can agree with that. I cannot remember much of what you said. Memories and stuff just came out.
- R:** I often felt as if you were not in the therapy room: it was just me, the Tree and my memories.
- C:** I remember seeing a therapist soon after Cassie died. He wanted me to scream and hit a pillow. I could not convey my pains and my issues in that manner, whereas I found this therapy different. I was able to do the therapy in my time. And it is the whole, not just the event i.e. Cassie's death.
- M:** How did you experience the process of starting with the roots, then the soil, then the trunk until you finally got to the fallen leaf?
- C:** The tree is so symbolic of life. The process allows one to feel safe, to feel strengthened, so that when you get to the fallen leaf, you are able to deal with those memories, those emotions and make some sense of it all. It also gave me the opportunity to find 'me': Who am I and where do I fit into this big picture of my life and my loss.
- CI:** The Tree metaphor follows a natural process and a logical for me; a seed grows into a tree, the tree grows up, then it branches out and then the leaf falls off.
- C:** In the beginning of the journey with the Tree I wondered where we were going: Why is it about me, my past and my memories, when it was about Cassie? That was why I came to therapy.

I soon realized that this was a process and one needs to remember, one needs to reconnect with self and with others to grow. I can look back now and say, “I have grown, I am OK and good things have happened, even though Cassie died.”

R: The process of going back and remembering helped me realize that I can carry on; I can be me again and live a life of a complete, fulfilled person again.

M: During our journey with the Tree, we had conversations about the leaves - significant people and relationships that make meaning in your life. How did you experience this?

C: When I saw all these people from my past and my present, I was reminded that I am not on my own. It helped me to feel part of a group again. When Cassie died I felt “apart” from people and relationships.

M: Modern grief theory says that when we grieve in the collective, not on our own, and when we reconnect with our “club of life” we are stronger. How do you see this?

R: When I look back now, I see that many new relationships were formed and old relationships were revived. I was also able to re-build a relationship with my dad, even though he has been dead for years. This rebuilt relationship is still having a ripple effect in my family.

CI: I realised that my club of life is ever changing, as I develop new relationships, as significant people in my life die, and as relationships change. I suppose the Tree of meaning is also ever changing, as my life changes and evolves in real life, but also in memory.

- C:** I will also hold onto my Tree of Meaning because it reminds me of who I am, where I have come from, what I have achieved, and that “I can”, even in the face of my son passing away. The Tree of Meaning reflects hope for me, for my future and in memory.
- CI:** The Tree of meaning reminded me that I had achieved in life, and that there is hope. Even without Karin, life is hopeful and meaningful.
- R:** Hope is often the only thing that we can hold onto; the Tree of Meaning re-connected me with hopeful stories and memories from my life.
- M:** How does remembering fit into this making meaning of grief?
- C:** I was in a place where I did not want to remember because memories were painful. But when I was able to remember, it was OK. When I started remembering I realised that there was so much good in my life that I had achieved and that life did still have meaning, even without Cassie. Memories give me a sense of meaning, and life a sense of hope.
- CI:** Remembering for me puts things into context. It allows one to see the big picture. Without that sense of meaning, life would be meaningless. My life is not a one-man show; my life only has meaning in the context of my relationships with others.

We spent some time celebrating the transport outside of the grief-saturated story and the sparkling moments that each co-researcher had experienced as they journeyed with the Tree of Meaning. A wonderful sense of hope, meaning and joy was shared by us all. We were forever changed - individually and collectively - because we had loitered under the Tree of Meaning. We ended the Definitional Ceremony by lighting candles in celebration and memory of our loved ones who had passed away.

CHAPTER 7

7 **Conclusions, reflection and evaluation, personal reflections.**

7.1 **Conclusions**

In order to weave all the threads of this research journey together, I will unpack the research gap first, so as to gain some further understanding and then I will pull all the various threads together as a whole, to gain a more complete picture of our journey. In so doing, I will answer the question posed in my research gap.

Memory is key to meaning-making. The ability for people to survive is dependent on the ability to derive meaning and purpose for their suffering (Frankl 1992:115) or, in the context of this research, their ability to derive meaning and purpose for their grief.

Our autobiographical memory aids current problem – solving by allowing individuals to ask new questions of old information. This is essential for meaning-making. This functional approach to memory is not focused so much on accuracy, as on how individuals recall, reconstruct, and share memories to serve meaningful purposes in their lives (Neimeyer 2001: 49).

Another key element of functional memory allows people to reflect on their past so that this can direct them in the present - the here and now. Although people have thousands of latent memories, one's current life context influences which memories are needed, recalled into memory and re-membered.

Thus these memories do not serve simply as directives in a specific life situation, but also serve more broadly by acting as landmarks in one's life narrative.

Our autobiographical memory is the memory we tap into when we remember. These memories are stored and retrieved by association, not only in the landscape of action (a factual account of historical events) but also in the landscape of identity (a vivid re-living of experience which incorporates our various senses and emotions):

The memories that they touched off were not just a factual account of historical events, but a full and vivid re-living of experience, one that incorporated the person's various senses and emotions.

(White 1988:22)

I submit that the Tree of Meaning metaphor - by being a vehicle for association really assists our autobiographical memory. For example, one of my co-researchers remembered her grandmother's home; then by association, memories of shining wooden floors (visual), memories of freshly baked bread (smell), and of feeling safe (emotional) memories flooded back into her consciousness (see above, page 115).

Frankl (1992:115) observed that the need for meaning is a fundamental human motivational factor. Nadeau (1998:56) and Weiler (2001:83) concur: one cannot recover from the loss of a loved one unless the meaning-making process is successful:

People also form personal significant memories about death experiences that they draw on in current life situations. Such memories also serve as originating events. They mark and reinforce a time at which the individual started living or thinking in a new way (*finding and making new meanings. Italics mine*). Although dealing with death and loss are likely to present coping challenges, it appears that they also present opportunities for positive attitude formation and adaptive memory use.

(Black et al 2008: 545)

I believe that these times that are “marked and reinforced” are part of finding meaning and the “opportunities for positive attitude formation” form part of the meaning-making we see in post-traumatic growth.

So to answer the question posed in my research gap: “The role of memory in finding and making meaning in and through grief.” I believe that through this research journey I have found that memory is central to our finding and making meaning. As we remember using memory - our minds actively structure our life experiences according to its own ordering system (Kant 1965: 8).

Our narratives (*stories*) are one of those ordering systems (Bruner 1986: 32).

Because our sense of meaning is challenged and frequently shattered by the death of a loved one, we often struggle to construct meaning of these events in our lives and there is “a retrospective alteration of its meaning” (Modell 2005:3)

Through our memory (re-membering), we can revise, edit and even rewrite these events. We can find new strands of meaning in our stories that connect the past and the future in a way that allows us to find and make meaning.

I submit that the Tree of Meaning metaphor not only assists people in discovering these connections between the past and the future, but also facilitates the finding and making of new meanings. The Tree of Meaning metaphor, which I used as my research model, thus functions as a pattern detector so that the meaning of old relationships can be unconsciously transferred to the present.

According to Modell (2005:4), the metaphor is like the “currency”, the means of transfer of meanings which are linked to memories in our minds.

As I reflect on the research, and more especially on the co-researchers’ stories, it seems as if the Tree of Meaning metaphor helps put the “shattered” puzzle pieces, caused by the loss of a loved one, back together again. In this reconfiguration the puzzle will look different from what it looked like before it was shattered by grief.

This “difference” is the new meanings that have been found and made through the re-authoring that has taken place as the co-researcher has re-membered with the aid of the Tree of Meaning metaphor.

In the context of grief therapy, changing the therapeutic stance – that is, using “remembering” instead of “forgetting” – frequently minimizes the symptoms of complicated grief and other risk factors. I found the following comment by Neimeyer et al hopeful:

Continuing bonds, (*assisted by re-membering*) appear to interact with meaning making in response to loss, such that those survivors who are able to make sense (*make meaning*) of the loss in personally meaningful terms, experience fewer symptoms of complicated grief. Moreover, the various component processes of meaning reconstruction (*sense making, benefit finding and progressive identity change*) seem to mitigate the impact of other risk factors focusing on the characteristics of the bereaved individual, the relationship to the deceased, and the death itself. (Italics mine)

(Neimeyer et al 2006:728)

7.2 Reflection and evaluation.

When I started this research journey, my main concern was the inadequacy of traditional therapeutic models – which tend to focus on “letting go” and “forgetting” – for dealing with the task of meaning-making following bereavement. Reflecting on this journey now, I realise that this was a very thin description of the research journey.

Therefore, I would like to share some of the knowledge gained, the lived experiences we have been celebrated together and how this joint journey has changed how we live.

Bereavement is something which happens to us, and frequently leaves us feeling helpless, hopeless and paralysed by despair. But reflecting on this research process I realize that the journey that I have undertaken with my co-researchers has been empowering. It has enabled us to experience agency: therapeutically, theologically and individually.

At the outset of this work I stated that the basis of this research was to be transformative and therapeutic. Now that this research journey has come to an end, I can bear witness to the fact that the co-researchers have indeed benefitted from their participation with me in the research. Together we have “felt and acknowledged one another’s pain, joys and also found meaning together” (Walsh 1990:135) in a research journey that has been mutually transforming.

Therapeutically, each co-researcher has made and found meaning in their lives and in their relationships. Loitering under the Tree of Meaning has enabled them to remember well: they have re-authored their problem saturated (grief) stories, and have thickened and celebrated many alternate and life-affirming stories.

As we loitered under the Tree of Meaning together, my own experience of the inadequacy of traditional grief models to make sense of my grief journey meant that I could not adopt the “expert” position or make sense of their journey for them. As Kotzé points out:

We cannot know *for* people what is good *for* them. We also have to know *with* them. To be ethical, the participation of the people *about* or *for* whom we do the research is of primary importance at all levels of our research.

(Kotzé et al 2002:27)

Loitering *with* my co-searchers under the Tree of Meaning hopefully means that this research journey will “contribute to ethically acceptable knowledge” (Dixon 1999:45).

Reflecting on this research journey I realise that, apart from any transport and transformation my co-researchers may have experienced, I have changed. On an academic level, I have learnt a great deal about bereavement work; I have also answered my research gap question and discovered the crucial part memory plays in bereavement.

We have explored the ways in which people remember, and have experienced that the really important thing is not so much *that* you remember but *how* you remember can make the difference between remaining fragmented by grief, or being re-constituted by the grief journey.

My learning has not merely been on an academic level. I have been stretched on many other levels too. Most significantly, I have changed the way I view therapy.

By using Narrative ideas, I have “cared with” my clients, and have included a more Feminist approach to “being” theology as a minister and as a therapist. Not only has my own grief story been re-constituted, but my understanding of myself as therapist and minister has been re-constituted too. While grief may have “shattered” the puzzle of our lives, loitering with others under the Tree of Meaning has enabled each of us to be re-configured differently, and that difference has made all the difference to how we view our grief and how we view our life. Thus, as I sit in my study and ask myself the question: How would I conduct grief therapy in a way that fosters the process of meaning-making? I find that I now can answer myself: By loitering under the “Tree of Meaning.”

7.3 Personal reflection

As I reflect on this journey from a more personal perspective, the following come to mind:

The Tree of Meaning metaphor has been a very helpful research model, but I found that one needs tremendous emotional and mental energy to do the twenty hours of co-research with each co-researcher. If I were to do further research using this model, I would prefer to work with a research team, so we could share the load.

I found it difficult and lonely at times bringing narrative ideas and my theology together, especially as I have no colleagues in ministry that work in this context of pastoral ministry. I was however blessed and assisted in this area by attending consultation groups with other Narrative therapists, some of whom are ministers.

This research journey has given me new insights in how I approach ministry, therapy and new ways of being. It has also started me thinking about how one could use narrative ideas and metaphor in the context of Trauma Therapy. I believe that much of our trauma work, tends to focus on the 'trauma saturated story' and our clients could experience more agency when we story and re-author alternative stories in their lives, using metaphor as a therapeutic platform.

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The role of memory in finding and making meaning in and through grief.

Information sheet for co-researchers

Dear

Thank you for allowing me to join you on your journey with grief, and for participating in the co - research for my Masters degree in Practical Theology.

As you know from conversations with me in counseling, I really struggle with ideas of “letting go” and “moving on” in our journey through grief. I also find it unhelpful and often disrespectful to place our journey through grief into neat little boxes of presumed “process, stages and phases”

I am hoping that through this research journey we are going to find alternative ways of finding and making meaning of grief and the role of remembering (memory) in that journey.

I appreciate your involvement as co-researchers in this journey and really value your expert input and involvement.

The other co-researchers, like you, have either lost a spouse or a child, so we all understand the grief very personally.

The research model I am using and will explain in detail in our first interview, is called a ‘Tree of Meaning.’ We will basically be drawing a tree together covering the following areas of our lives and then share the stories (narratives) around those areas to hopefully clarify the role of memory in the meaning making of our grief journey:

Roots - Family history, origins, places that have significant meaning in your life.

Soil – Significant events that have shaped your life and made meaning.

Trunk – Skills, talents, training.

Branches – Dreams, goals, things that you aspire to, things that will give your life meaning.

Leaves – significant people / relationships that have made added meaning to your life.

Fallen leaves – significant people who you have lost through death.

Metaphor of the fallen leaf, returning to the ground and becoming ‘life giving to the tree. How the death of a loved one re invested in meaning making of your life.

Fruit – achievements

Bugs – Problems that you face day-to-day / giants in your life.

Free participation

You are free to withdraw from the research project at any time without any negative consequences for you.

Confidentiality

The information obtained during our conversations will be used in our group session and in the dissertation, but only with your prior consent. Names and other information that you want to keep confidential can and will be agreed on, during the process.

The information collected will be kept securely on CD and locked away in a safe, for future studies, naturally with your prior consent.

Results of the study

Information and insights gained in this research may be published. At your request (names and places) will be altered to ensure your anonymity. You will have the choice of using your own name or a pseudonym of your choice.

Questions of co-researchers.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this research, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me:

Mike Witney (Rev)
Student Number 27545394
Tel: 021 975 4354
Cell: 082 326449
E-mail: mikew@durbanvillebaptist.co.za

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Practical Theology, University of Pretoria.

My supervisor: Prof Julian Muller, Head of the Department of Practical Theology, University of Pretoria

ANNEXURE 2

The role of memory in finding and making meaning in and through grief.

Consent Form for Co-researcher.

I have read the information sheet concerning this research and I understand what it entails. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I understand and accept that:

1. My participation in this research is entirely voluntary.
2. I am free to withdraw from this research at any time without any disadvantage.
3. I am aware of what will happen to my personal information at the conclusion of the research.
4. I will receive no payment or compensation for participation in the research.
5. All personal information supplied to me will remain confidential throughout the research.
6. I am aware that Mike Witney's supervisor, other faculty staff and academia will read this material.

I am willing to participate in this research.

Signature of participant

Date

Name of participant in capital letters.

Signature of witness

ANNEXURE 3

The role of memory in finding and making meaning in and through grief.

Consent Form for the release of Information by Co-researchers

I declare that:

1. I have read the summary of the project.
2. I have had the opportunity to make changes to that information, including suggestions, corrections or comments to summaries pertaining to my participation.
3. I agree that my suggestions, corrections or comments can be included in the research.
4. I have read the final summary of our conversations and agree that this is an accurate and satisfactory account of the research, and I therefore give permission for this summary to be used in the research report as well as in the group discussions.

I understand that the information obtained during the conversations may be included in article format for publication. I understand that my confidentiality will be safeguarded throughout the study, in the written report of the project and in the publication. I also understand that should I decide that any information that may lead to my identification should not be used, it will not be used or included in the project report or publication.

I prefer the following name (either own name or pseudonym) be used in the research report or any other publication resulting from the project.

Name to be used _____

Signature of Co-researcher

Date