

'Even Now': Ongoing and Experiential Interpretations of Childhood Loss

By

Janet Theresa Newbury
B.A., University of Ottawa, 1998

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the School of Child and Youth Care

© Janet Theresa Newbury, 2007
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

'Even Now': Ongoing and Experiential Interpretations of Childhood Loss

by

Janet Theresa Newbury
B.A. University of Ottawa, 1998

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Marie Hoskins, Supervisor
(School of Child and Youth Care)

Dr. Jennifer White, Departmental Committee Member
(School of Child and Youth Care)

Dr. Gweneth Doane, Outside Committee Member
(School of Nursing)

Dr. Mark Krueger, External Examiner
(Child and Youth Care Learning Center, University of Wisconsin)

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Marie Hoskins, Supervisor
(School of Child and Youth Care)

Dr. Jennifer White, Departmental Committee Member
(School of Child and Youth Care)

Dr. Gweneth Doane, Outside Committee Member
(School of Nursing)

Dr. Mark Krueger, External Examiner
(Child and Youth Care Learning Center, University of Wisconsin)

ABSTRACT

In this study, I aim to achieve a richer understanding of ongoing experiences of childhood loss. Hermeneutic philosophy highlights the importance of moving back and forth between the parts and the whole of any subject one might wish to comprehend. To apply such a perspective to this research, I simultaneously engage with multiple aspects of the research process. These include: dominant and alternative understandings of childhood loss, the personal experiences of my research participants, multiple perspectives on the meaning of their experiences, the relationships among researchers and participants, and my own processes of interpreting the stories that were shared with me. The relational process of research itself has been recognized and demonstrated as reflective of that which is required to effectively connect with and support grieving children.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Page	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Dedication	vi
Journal Entries	1
Introduction	3
Research Methodology	13
Research Question	14
Participant Selection	17
Interview Process	20
Interview Transcription	23
Analysis	23
The Lens of Developmental Psychology	28
The Lens of Culture and Context	48
The Lens of Social Constructionism	67
The Lens of Hermeneutics	91
Implications for Practice	108
Engaging Relationally in Research and Practice	110
The Role of Reflexivity in Research and Practice	114
The Value of a Narrative Approach	121
Concluding Thoughts	123
Appendix A: Timeline of Childhood Events and Losses of Participants	125
Appendix B: Interview Guide	126
References	130

Acknowledgements

I deeply appreciate the willingness of Cathy, Harvey, and Roy to participate in this study and the openness with which they did so. All three participants contributed in ways above and beyond participating in research interviews, which added to the richness of this learning experience. I am also grateful for the support (including advice, constructive conversation, and proofreading) that came from my husband, Graham Lavery; my father, Winston Newbury; my mother-in-law, Gerry Lavery; my uncle, Wayne MacPhail; my committee members, Dr. Marie Hoskins, Dr. Jennifer White, and Dr. Gweneth Doane; and countless other friends and family who were so willing to talk things through with me time and time again. Thanks also to my committee members, including my external examiner, Dr. Mark Krueger, for such an in-depth and engaging oral examination experience. Additional mention of the early and enduring emotional support from my husband, Graham, is in order, as it was his belief in me that enabled me to take on this challenge.

In memory of Rhys

Journal Entries

*

Calgary, Canada. 8 June, 2005 (A couple of weeks after the death of my little friend and client). I feel very alone and separate here in Calgary trying to get my head around such an intense loss from this distance. My daily life hasn't changed, but it feels like it should. How can I have known such a magical individual and not experience my life being tipped upside down with his death? There's something not right about this ... Since he died he has been in my thoughts more than anything else. Even when I haven't been thinking about him directly, he is shaping my thoughts and feelings almost entirely. But on the outside, my life seems to be unchanged.

*

Hoi An, Vietnam. 15 September, 2006. (Just three days after my return to Vietnam). I've arrived in Hoi An, reconnected with Robyn, explored the town, met Binh, and most recently: visited the orphanage. That did a number on me. It was strange for me to meet the carers again – the same carers that were here 4 and a half years ago – and to realize these daily routines have been part of their lives for the entire time I've been away. ...Oh, and I saw Loc last night. Of course I'm a blip on his radar, if that. But seeing him was monumental to me. He's 16 years old; I hardly recognized him! I think it was important for me to come back here – to see him all grown up, to see the orphanage, the town – so I don't freeze it all in time. Discovering how Loc fits into the community has added a level of complexity to him in my mind that I would not have previously appreciated. I need that. I need to understand how much bigger than me this all is, so I can be realistic in

determining my role – and so I can be mindful of not making a simplified distinction between good and bad when it comes to practice. If only it were that easy.

*

Powell River, Canada, 11 June, 2007. (During the revision stages of my thesis). As I continue to research childhood loss I am reminded of the experience of studying a language. At first I know so little that any addition to my current state of knowing feels like a major accomplishment. But then, as I become more and more familiar with the language I am learning, the more I realize I have yet to learn. Finally, I proudly reach a point where I can at least communicate. Then the rug is pulled out from under me once again when I realize how local the dialect I've learned is! In the same way, how can I do justice to the complex language of grief and still be understood? The more intricacies I try to incorporate, the less clear my message is. And then I start questioning even that ... I am learning a lot, but – I discover again and again – that doesn't necessarily simplify anything. The next challenge is to determine how to best articulate my learning. How can this journey be shared in a way that is clear but doesn't lose its meaning?

*

... These are some of the layers of experiences that contribute to my approach in the current study. They are just some of the complexities I struggle with as I try to engage in this research with honesty and openness. During the process of researching I have been presented with even more ...

Introduction

While working with children and youth in various capacities, I have continuously found myself faced with the challenge of connecting with a child who has experienced (or is experiencing) grief or loss of some sort. I have struggled to know how to do this in a way that does not put children in categories based on their age, cultural group, the type of loss, or their relationship with the person who has died or left. I could see that their experiences were more complex than that, but had a hard time knowing how to honour that complexity without flailing around completely directionless.

It was in the spring of 2005 that I was personally confronted with the death of someone I loved for the first time. It was in the fall of 2005 that I began my Masters program in Child and Youth Care (hereafter, CYC). Perhaps because the two experiences occurred so closely together, and it was through a lens of grief and loss that I began my studies, the area I began to focus on academically became childhood loss¹.

For the bulk of this academic journey, I have found myself simultaneously consulting both literature *and* my own personal and family history looking for 'answers' about grief². It wasn't a conscious choice of mine. What I realize now is that in order to comprehend or make meaning of what I was reading, I needed to relate it somehow to my context. So, back and forth I went, moving from general concepts to specific, personal

1 I have used the word 'loss' as opposed to bereavement because I felt it unnecessary to limit my exploration to the experience of loss due to the death of a loved one. That said, most of the literature I have consulted and much of the data I collected in my own research does address loss as a result of bereavement.

2 The word 'grief' has been defined in multiple ways. Judith Murray (2001) defines it as "the emotional response to loss" (p. 219). This idea is reflected in much of the literature I read – both professional and academic (see Cohen & Mannarino, 2004; James, Friedman, & Landon Matthews, 2002). Perhaps more importantly, this definition is supported by my research participants. Although defining the word 'grief' is difficult, they all indicate that it encompasses the feelings they have been left with as a result of their many losses (not only bereavement).

accounts and back again. Eventually, my personal history became such a central part of this process that it is now part of my present (Berikoff, 2006). This personal history is a part of the lens through which I read what experts have (and have had) to say, and part of the lens through which I observe and interact with people who are grieving a loss of some kind. It is not left behind just because new things are being said, but is as alive now as it was then – and as a result has taken on a new form (Reid, 2005).

Therefore, in order for me to learn, I need to bring these multiple influences (my personal history, academic and professional experiences, familial relationships, and other contextual elements by which I come to understand the world) to the forefront of my studies. If I acknowledge that my interpretations of the literature on CYC and on grief, as well as my interactions with those who are grieving, are largely shaped by my history and perspectives, then to study those influences as well can help bring depth to the potential of my understanding (Gergen, 1999; Krueger, 1997). Hopefully, too, doing so can enable me to explore new ways of talking about both grief *and* our potential roles in that process as helpers (Hoskins, 2003), since the words that “we choose to label and describe experiences have obvious and inadvertent consequences” (Moules, 1998, p. 145).

In addition, as I interviewed my participants for this research, I could hear that the same complexities were likely at play for them as well. In articulating their experiences for me, they employed various discourses that have become part of the world in which they and I live. And the discourses they employed seem to have played a role in how they have come to make meaning of their experiences of childhood loss. These were complexities I could not ignore.

Just as grief is not experienced in isolation from other life situations, relationships, contextual elements, and complexities, neither can it be studied in isolation. Since I am curious about the relational dimension of experiences of loss, then to study in a way that acknowledges such relationships is a method that aligns well with my intentions (Silverman, 2005). When I tried moving past my own experiences and perspectives in studying this topic, I felt somehow as though I was falsely presenting the research process as tidier than it actually was. My own subjectivity is a part of every aspect of everything I do and my judgements and values find their way into my work. Ignoring this fact completely contradicted what I was hoping to study, and made proceeding an impossible task. Embracing it has brought care, attention, and rigor, not to mention meaning, to my studies that I could not otherwise achieve. As observed by Mark Krueger (1997), “an awareness of one’s experiences and feelings leads to a deeper understanding of the meaning of what is occurring” (p. 154).

It was only after I decided to acknowledge my own role in this study that I have been able to explore in a way that allows me to consider the process of learning as well as the subject itself. My question changed in such a way that the focus moved from finding an answer to engaging in a process³. I wanted to engage in conversations with my participants that could help to bring forth their stories in ways that are meaningful to them. In doing this I wanted to understand more fully – by experiencing it with my

3 I have chosen to participate in a challenge recommended by Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe (1992) by which they invite researchers to not “attempt to generate conclusions of universal proportion ... rather ... be concerned with the enormous variations in forms of bereavement ... Effectively, this is to urge a substantial broadening of self-reflective dialogue within the field” (p. 1211).

participants – the multiple relationships among their ‘selves’ and their contexts⁴ as they have interpreted their experiences of childhood loss over time. By doing this I felt I could at least begin to address some of the complexities that may be part of their experiences of their losses, as well as some of the complexities encountered by researchers and practitioners in trying to understand the losses of others.

One relationship that could not be ignored in all of this is that between researcher and participants. In *Child and Youth Care*, an understanding of the significance of relationship is paramount (Fewster, 1990). Therefore, I have selected research participants with whom I have deep and meaningful relationships, in the hopes of adding depth and meaning to my research process (Adler & Adler, in Hertz, 1997). By doing this, I feel my area of study and my method have become more congruent. With this congruency, I am able to explore in a multitude of directions, honouring the “relational matrix” (Gergen, 1998) of contextual elements simultaneously at play.

This dance (Krueger, 2000) among my personal, familial, historical, and academic selves and contexts brings me in and out, global and local, general and specific, around and around. It feels coincidentally reflective of what is frequently referred to as the “hermeneutic circle”, which is described by Steiner Kvale (1996) as follows:

The understanding of a text takes place through a process in which the meaning of the separate parts is determined by the global meaning of the text, as it is

4 While my dictionary defines ‘self’ as “a person’s or thing’s own individuality or essence” (Bisset, 2002, p. 938), I have not come to see it as such. In fact, I question my own act of dividing self and context in the binary way that I have, though I feel limited by language and do so from time to time in this study (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Mahoney, 2003). It has become clear through my participants’ experiences that their ‘individuality’ is quite intricately related to the contexts in which they find themselves. As articulated so well by Reid (2005), “for [John] Locke, the self is aware of itself over time through memory of the past and imagination of the future, as it is aware of itself at-a-time through sensation and perception” (p. 674). With this understanding of self, there is simply no removing it from its contexts, or defining it outside of them.

anticipated. The closer determination of the meaning of the separate parts may eventually change the originally anticipated meaning of the totality, which again influences the meaning of the separate parts, and so on. In principle, such a hermeneutical explication of the text is an infinite process, while it ends in practice when one has reached a sensible meaning, free of inner contradictions. (p. 47)

This explanation and its practical implications are further supported and elaborated on by Kenneth Gergen in his *Invitation to Social Construction* (1999). Gergen highlights the value of the relational and necessarily ongoing process of interpretation, rather than simply focusing on end results of such processes.

It is in this spirit that I will proceed with my exploration of ongoing and experiential interpretations of childhood loss. It has been consideration of my participants' stories in context that has led me to choose a structure that somewhat resembles a narrative. Although theoretical understandings are a significant part of the picture, the narrative of the exploration will be in the foreground, with theory and literature serving to support, rather than direct, the story.

I do this intentionally. For as I conducted my interviews, it became increasingly clear to me that my three participants are story-tellers. It was vivid description, not abstract analysis, that led to the richest insights and learning in our interview processes. Kvale (1996) supports my research experience by stating: "...the thought and expression of a primarily oral culture [is described] as being close to the human life world, situational, empathic and participatory, additive, aggregative, agonistic, and redundant. In contrast, written culture is characterized by analytic, abstract, and objectively distanced forms of thought and expression" (p. 167).

My participants are from Newfoundland⁵ (as am I), an island bountiful with stories of the land, the people, the hardships, and the beauty. It is a place with a folk tradition that has arguably always existed, but has been promoted, propagated, encouraged, and capitalized upon particularly in the past 60 years or so – the time span coincidentally covering both the time since Newfoundland's entry into Canadian confederation and the lifetimes of my participants. In that time it has also developed a tradition, as a post-colonial society, of presenting “a collection of images and narratives that will distinguish it from its past and establish it as a place” (Rompkey, 2006, p. x). It has been largely through narrative that this land has managed to reinvent itself in this still new and changing political and cultural context (Rompkey, 2006).

Thus, it is the narrative form that makes sense within my familial, ancestral, and historical context. It is the narrative form that dominates the cultural context in which my study took place. In addition, narrative is a form which typically engages listeners, encouraging mutual sharing and listening, rather than defensiveness or adversity which is sometimes invited with abstract analysis or debate (Gergen, 1999). Most importantly, it is the narrative form that my participants most readily adopted during our conversations, and for me to try to transcribe their depictions into anything else would not add to the potential learning, but strip it of its character. I aim for this exploration to be accessible, to be reflective of the context in which I am exploring, and to contribute to ongoing discussions about interpretations and experiences of childhood grief and loss in a way that engages with – rather than challenges – the current discussion.

5 After much deliberation, I have chosen to refer to the island of Newfoundland, rather than the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, as it is this island – and this word – with which my participants identify and to which they referred in our conversations.

When attempting to understand the stories I heard during my interviews, it has become evident to me that the lens through which I choose to view the accounts of childhood loss has a significant bearing on how I come to interpret them, and thus respond to them. There is no way for me to singularly determine the meanings of what was said by my participants. The meanings I hear depend largely on the underlying knowledge and values that inform my own perspective. And even as an individual, multiple perspectives are simultaneously at play, depending on my vantage point at any given time.

I do not wish to replace one mode of thinking about grief or loss with another. I believe it is important, however, to recognize and explore the process by which my thoughts about the experiences of loss shared with me will impact my response to them. In this study I will highlight this process by approaching the stories shared by my participants from multiple perspectives. I will treat each of these perspectives as a distinct lens⁶ in an ongoing reflective process. It is developing an ability to identify, consider, and explore these multiple perspectives that becomes essential when learning to engage intentionally with children who have experienced a loss. Understanding the impact of personal experiences and biases is valuable not only in research but also in Child and Youth Care practice (Krueger, 1997).

⁶ By using the metaphor of 'lenses' I wish to demonstrate that these theoretical frameworks can impact how one views the world. The stories shared by my participants may or may not change, but when looking at them through different lenses, I can see quite different things. By experimenting with the idea of lenses, I can acknowledge the role of interpretation in in both research and practice. In other words, as both a researcher and a practitioner I respond not to 'what is', but to 'what I see'. At times, I will also talk of discourses, perspectives, and frameworks, which all have different nuances and meanings, but it is the metaphor of the lens that has helped me to orient myself in this process.

The material that follows aims to engage with the stories of my participants through four lenses, presented as distinct. These include developmental psychology, cultural and contextual perspectives, social constructionism, and hermeneutics. Each perspective is a crucial part of the ongoing reflection that brings me toward a deeper understanding of the potential meanings presented by the participants in this study. And each perspective is in some way utilized by my participants as they share the meaning they have made of their losses. No lens tells the whole story, but the story ceases to exist without them all. It is important to note that each of the perspectives presented represents a particular point in my own learning. Although this is written as an individual process, it is also necessary to note that it has been through dialogue that much of my own learning has come about. As stated by Marie Hoskins (2003) with whom I have had many such dialogues, "Conversations ... are more than idle pastimes or ways of connecting; they are essential for the process of self-determination." If not for conversation I would not have been exposed to the perspectives - and the stories - I explore here, making this journey both intra- and interpersonal.

*

"You knew this story before." – Cathy

"I guess the best place to start is as far back as I can remember." – Harvey

"Let me tell you a little story ..." – Roy

*

Cathy, Harvey, and Roy are the three participants in this study. Adults now, these siblings all experienced a great deal of loss in their childhoods⁷. Their father was an engineer on a schooner off the coast of Newfoundland, which kept him at sea from early Spring until late Fall each year. In November of 1955 his ship was lost, all seven crew never to be seen again. At that time Cathy was eleven, Harvey was ten, and Roy was eight years old. They had two older sisters, both married with children; two older brothers, teenagers at the time; and two younger brothers, a toddler and an infant.

Their mother was dying of stomach cancer, although they didn't know it. Shortly after the schooner was lost, she was admitted to the hospital. At that time the dependent children were dispersed among family members. Cathy, Harvey, and Roy were sent to Halifax, Nova Scotia, along with three other brothers, while the rest remained in Newfoundland. Their mother died in January, 1956. Only their oldest sister and oldest brother were in St. John's, Newfoundland, to attend their mother's funeral.

A year passed and in January of 1957 their second oldest sister, Betty⁸, died of lung cancer. She had been guardian to the three youngest brothers for the past year, and with her death the family became even more widely dispersed. William Junior was then cared for by a cousin who adopted him ten years later. The two other brothers were taken into the care of their Aunt Nora, who died of cancer only two months later.

7 See Appendix A for a timeline of childhood events and losses of participants.

8 Although complete anonymity is not possible to achieve for all people implicated in this study, I have chosen to only use the real names of my three participants (all of whom feel comfortable with this choice). All other names are fictitious, to enable as much anonymity as possible for others.

With Nora's death the family reached a point of desperation. Roy, the third youngest, was sent to Newfoundland to live with his oldest sister, Violet. And the baby, Warren ... he was adopted outside the family: 18 months old and off to his fourth home.

By this time Cathy was thirteen, Harvey was twelve, and Roy was ten years old. In less than two years they had gone from sleeping in the same bed back in their hometown of Stone's Cove, Newfoundland, to living in different houses, in different provinces, with different families. I am Cathy's daughter and the niece of Harvey and Roy, who are now 62, 61, and 59 respectively.

Research Methodology

I will tell you something about stories ...

They aren't just entertainment.

Don't be fooled.

(Leslie Marmon Silko, in Kamarck Minnich, 2005, p. 97)

While the stories of my research participants provide the valuable data that inform this study, my own story of researching is what frames it. By also exploring my own process of interpreting them, I felt able to present this process in a way that was reflective of the multiple layers of my personal experience of this research. This enables me to simultaneously study the topic of childhood loss and the research process itself. Consideration of how my own perspective plays a part in this research is highly relevant to practice as well, as it is a reminder that to be an effective practitioner means understanding one's own role in the helping relationship as much as that of the help-seeker or of the issue with which he or she might be struggling (Krueger, 1994). Moules (1998) reminds us that therapeutic practice is guided, at least in part, by our assumptions about grief. Thus, research that incorporates exploration of those (and other) assumptions can help towards a better understanding of how to engage in helping relationships. In other words, research – like practice – can be relational by emphasizing not only individual experiences but also relationships and contexts.

Although impossible to entirely replicate an experience (as was also made clear by my participants), I chose to document this process through multiple lenses, as it allowed me to acknowledge that many influences were at play in my interpretations. A

shortcoming of this approach is that I drew some artificial lines around various perspectives which, in reality, do not exist entirely outside of each other. So although these perspectives have been separated from one another temporarily, my intention is to illustrate how – for my three participants and for me – many discourses simultaneously inform one another as we strive to make meaning of their experiences of loss. For example, all three participants express a belief that their grief is in some ways impacted by their age at the times of their losses. At the same time, religious and spiritual beliefs, familial and local cultural discourses, and others dimensions of their experiences make their way into the meaning making processes for my participants. Separating some overarching discourses into distinct ‘lenses’ as I have allows me to explore these in more detail, however I ultimately wish to demonstrate how integrated they in fact are.

To begin, I will outline the method by which I have engaged in this process. This will hopefully make transparent my processes and rationale, to enable future discussion to carry forward without too many unanswered questions about where I currently stand, and why.

Research Question

As mentioned previously, my interest in childhood loss began with a desire to better equip myself to respond to the needs of children I encounter who have experienced a loss of some kind. In order to do that, I wanted to find ways of hearing stories of childhood loss in all their complexity, rather than simplifying them to a one-dimensional series of events. I wanted to be able to incorporate the emotional, relational, and other dimensions that arose as significant to them. I also came to see value in viewing them in

the context of the lifespan, rather than seeing their losses as purely childhood experiences. The question that conveys my initial curiosity (which was to better understand the experience of childhood grief and loss) has undergone many transformations. Each question I created seemed somehow to limit my exploration and strip it of its potential for embracing complexities that may emerge.

It is often after some time has passed that we can reflect enough to begin to make meaning of an event. The counselling process (Peavy, 2004), the research process (Bernard, 2000), narrative construction (Bruner, 2004), and substance misuse (Goldberg, 2001) are examples of lived experiences that are frequently described as becoming easier to articulate and make sense of over time. According to my participants, childhood loss is another such experience. Only because so much time has passed, they now feel able to share with me some of the many complexities that impacted (and continue to impact) their losses. If asked to discuss these experiences as they were happening, they told me they would not have considered as many dimensions. Thus, it seemed that if I wanted to find a way of understanding how to best support children who had experienced a loss, I had best be patient and back up. Stepping back from the immediate experience and listening to some reflections by adults was how I decided to approach this exploration. This way I could explore their experiences with childhood loss in the context of their whole lives up to now. Since children and adults are not, after all, separate groups of people, this enables me to consider children's experiences of loss within the greater context of not only their current worlds, but their pasts and futures as well. In addition, if I wish to contribute to practice, then focusing on my own beliefs and discourses that

might surface in practice is also necessary (Krueger, 1997; Moules, Simonson, Fleiszer, Prins, & Glasgow, 2007).

Ultimately, the question I have settled on is as follows: How are experiences of childhood loss interpreted over time?

This question was largely inspired by both social constructionism and a hermeneutic way of thinking. That is, it emphasizes processes, not conclusions; relationships, not answers; how things are, not what they are (Gergen, 1999; Kvale, 1996; Ramberg, 2005).

By focusing on interpretations of the experience, I could allow myself to dive into the meanings my participants attribute to their experiences, rather than getting too caught up in what 'actually' happened (Gergen, 1999), as well as considering how my own beliefs inform my interpretations of their stories (Krueger, 1997; Moules, 1998). Since "interpretation is inseparable from understanding" (Moules, et al., 2007, p. 120), it seems that if I wish to understand, I must consider the role of interpretation in the process.

In addition, by paying attention to these interpretations over time, there is room to acknowledge any changes in meaning that may have taken place over the lifespan since the losses, and explore any explanations the participants may have for those changes (Berikoff, 2006). This may contribute to a deeper understanding of childhood loss, by encouraging consideration of discourses, relationships, contexts, and interpretations on experiences of it. Of course there is great value in research that studies the lived experiences of participants who are still deeply embedded in their loss because of temporal proximity to them. However, in this case I wish to explore meanings of

childhood losses with participants, and the complex web of factors that contribute to those meanings. Thus, I chose to work with adults who can recall their experiences of childhood loss and reflect on those considerations. Grief is increasingly being understood as a lifelong process (Moules, 1998), so exploring it as such can contribute to new ways of relating with children who are experiencing it.

Participant Selection

I have already acknowledged that I became interested in studying childhood grief and loss early in my studies. The decision to explore within my own family context, however, was reached when I approached the proposal writing stage of my research.

I was new to Victoria, British Columbia, the city in which I was attending university, and did not have a relationship with any hospice or other related institution. I felt strongly that a foundation of a relationship was necessary if I wished for people to share their personal experiences with me. However, I did not think it was ethical for me to intentionally establish a closer relationship with potential research participants for the purposes of collecting thesis data (Fewster, 2006).

I was playing out this difficulty in conversation with my mother, who was visiting me at the time. As we talked about it, she agreed with my reservations, and drew on her own experiences to support my sentiments. Throughout my studies, and my personal experiences with grief, I frequently found myself in conversations with my mother about her childhood losses, and suddenly it occurred to me that it was not necessary for me to be looking beyond those conversations. My mother was not only willing to participate; she was excited at the idea of it. The fact that a relationship was already established

enabled rich conversations to occur without much in the way of inhibition. This led me to believe that my own family might be an ideal research site in which to explore some of these complex and very personal questions.

As I talked with her about it, I began to see some benefits to speaking with adults from my own family who had experienced losses as children. First, cultural and contextual elements could be deeply explored, as so much time had passed since their losses. With children I might not have access to extensive interpretations of these reflections on the experience. Second, there was a degree of trust that existed in these relationships, which would enable a deeper exploration, I believed (and was, in fact, already seeing). Third, the role of relationship in the research process could be analyzed in depth. As outlined above in the description of hermeneutic processes, I felt that my role in the research would impact what 'knowledge' it might contribute to. Thus, to engage with participants with whom I have a relationship, this impact could hopefully be made more explicit. Fourth, I had a personal investment in this research that would not reduce, but would contribute to the care and attention paid to my work. I cared about my participants, which (right or wrong) seemed to increase my care for the study in which I was engaging.

For all of these reasons, I felt as though I was accessing a resource that was already before me, and in which I already had a vested interest, rather than 'creating' a research site for the purposes of my studies. It felt authentic, and incredibly valuable. "Hermeneutic inquiry involves the selection of participants ... that can best illuminate the topic and invite an extended understanding of it" (Moules, et al., 2007, p. 120). Since

these participants have firsthand experiences with childhood loss, are willing to explore the meaning these experiences hold for them, and are comfortable in doing that with me, they seemed to be an appropriate fit for this study.

My mother was the middle of nine siblings at the time of the deaths of her parents. My process for selecting which siblings to include in the study was fairly straightforward. I wanted to explore the meaning they attribute *and* attributed to their childhood losses, so I wanted participants who were of an age at which they were aware of the losses as they happened. I also wanted to include siblings who were young enough to still have been living at home at the time of the losses. The youngest sibling was an infant at the time of the deaths, and the second youngest was two years old. The oldest two siblings were married with children at the time, and the third to oldest was away at university. Of course the losses for the older and younger siblings were no less profound. But for the purposes of my study I felt that participants who were children at the time of the losses would be most appropriate.

This left me with four siblings who were 14, 11, 10, and 8 years of age at the time of their parents' deaths. So, it was these four siblings I invited to participate in the study. The sibling who was 14 years old at the time of the losses decided not to participate, but the other three were enthusiastic to be involved. The eleven-year-old was my mother, Cathy, and the ten- and eight-year-olds were my uncles, Harvey and Roy respectively. I was pleased also to have both genders represented among my participants, although this was admittedly a happy coincidence. The losses explored began in 1955, and my participants are now 62, 61, and 59 years of age respectively.

Interview Process

After explaining to each of my participants the nature of my study and receiving word of their interest in participating, I sent each of them a consent form to complete. The consent form included more concrete details of the study, including the limitations of anonymity as a result of our relationships. I encouraged each of them to call or email me if they had questions or curiosities, which none of them did until it came time for us to schedule dates and times for our interview sessions. Prior to the interviews, I emailed each of them a list of potential interview questions. I welcomed the participants to peruse them, journal about them, or ask questions if they wished. Because I live in western Canada and all of my participants live in eastern Canada, most communication prior to the interviews took place by way of email.

I travelled to Newfoundland and Nova Scotia in February, 2007 to conduct interviews. Interviews were face-to-face, and there were two per participant. Both of Cathy's took place in her home. Roy's first interview took place in his home, and his second in my sister's home. Both of Harvey's interviews took place in my sister's home. First and second interviews were approximately one week apart for each participant. Although I came to each interview equipped with a pre-established interview guide (which differed somewhat from the interview questions I had sent them), I did not follow the guide closely. The guide is based on a recommended interview guide found in *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing* by Steiner Kvale (1996), with my own addition of a column with the heading 'considerations.' For the interest of the reader, my interview guide is included as Appendix B.

The reason I did not follow the guide closely is because my participants were so very willing and eager to share their stories without a lot of prompting. For the most part, I found myself asking probing questions based on what they had told me, but I was able to obtain the information I had hoped to gather through the interview guide without consulting it directly. Questions for my second interview were more emergent – based on the first interviews for each participant – so while the ideas I had hoped to explore with the question above were addressed, the interviews seemed to flow more like a conversation than a formally structured interview.

I attribute much of the ease of conversation to the close relationships I have with my three participants, as do they. The comfort level was very high for all of us, and thus, the sharing of stories, feelings, and ideas came about easily. I also attribute it to the descriptive nature of the way each of my participants tended to relay their stories. Analytical questions, such as the ones in the interview guide for the second interview, were not as successful. Particularly with Cathy, who was my first interview participant, there was some difficulty establishing rhythm in the second interview. I was eventually able to adjust my style of questioning in such a way that elicited more in the way of description than abstract analysis from my participants. While their perceptions, interpretations, and meanings still made their ways into the answers, it happened most effectively when they were not elicited directly.

The first interview with each participant was intended for me to get an idea of their overall stories and the meanings they attribute to the events that occurred in their

childhoods. Of course, within those stories, a lot of deep meaning and interpretation made its way. I began the first interview with each participant with a suggestion: to draw or describe a timeline in which they outline the most significant events related to their losses. In each case, they chose to talk rather than draw or write. And in each case, the participants began telling their stories in a linear way, but ended up jumping back and forth in time because in many situations their understandings of past events came much later in life. This was an interesting consequence of having interviewed adult participants rather than children.

After the first interview, I reminded each participant that the second interview was intended to look more deeply at how they have made meaning of their experiences and how those meanings may have changed over time. I invited them to contact me if they wished between interviews, which none of them did (other than to arrange times and locations for second interviews). The second interviews with each participant began with me asking them if anything had come to mind since the previous interview that they would like to include or call to my attention. In each case, the answer was yes, and this began a new, much more interpretive conversation about their losses and the meanings they associate with them. The second interview also included questions that had emerged for me since the first interview. I contacted each of them following the second interview, and they all expressed appreciation and gratitude for having been invited to participate in the interview process.

Interviews were all recorded with both a digital recorder and a webcam (using only the audio function of the webcam). Immediately following each interview, the webcam recording was then burned onto a CD, leaving me with three digital copies of each interview.

Interview Transcription

Transcriptions were all done by me, the researcher and interviewer. They were done manually, without the aid of any software. I listened to the recordings, and typed what I heard, including pauses, stutters, and utterances such as 'um' or 'ah.' Only if it added to potential understanding of the meaning of the words did I include mention of other things going on in my transcription. For instance, [laughter], [smile], [tears], and [welling up] were sometimes included. Occasionally, if a participant pointed to something – such as a photograph or their chest – I would also include that detail in square parentheses. Otherwise, only vocalizations were recorded in the transcriptions.

Much of the transcribing of the first interviews was done in the time between first and second interviews for each participant. This helped me to take notes and determine further areas for questioning in the second interviews. Second interviews were transcribed the week following the final interviews.

Analysis

In analyzing my interview data, I first began by seeking themes. I read transcripts and listened to recordings repeatedly, and eventually selected five themes that seem to be present in the stories of all three participants. However, when I started writing, I felt that

I was once again simplifying, generalizing, and falsely assuming the role of an omniscient narrator, so I opened a new file and started again.

During that process, I became aware that I was selecting certain themes and ignoring those that were not as easy to grasp or understand. This reminded me of the role my own lens plays in what my research ultimately claims. Thus, I decided instead to analyze the data through multiple lenses and see where that took me. When speaking of social science research in general, and qualitative research specifically, Bochner (2000) says, "In our hearts, if not in our minds, we know that the phenomena we study are messy, complicated, uncertain and soft. Somewhere along the line, we became convinced that these qualities were signs of inferiority, which we should not expose. It appeared safer to keep the untidiness of our work to ourselves" (p. 267). He goes on to identify, however, the "alterative" effects of "alternative" ways of engaging in social research that allow the uncertainty to make itself visible – bringing about "changes in form and in purpose" (p. 67). This seemed to make room for the process I had actually found myself immersed in during my research process.

I chose four perspectives, all of which I had been exploring to some degree throughout my studies, and all of which I heard my participants engaging with as they shared and made meaning of their stories. They are: developmental psychology, cultural and contextual perspectives, social constructionism, and hermeneutics. There were others that I would have been eager to explore as well, such as gender, but which did not emerge as significant to my participants; I chose not to pursue those perspectives. Since I wanted to explore their experiences in context, I decided that looking at (or through)

some of the discourses with which they (and I) engage could highlight some of the ways that they relate with those contexts. The relationships between my participants and the worlds they live in are thus further complicated, since even the language employed plays a significant role in how they have come to understand their losses.

I took these four perspectives one at a time and temporarily treated them as lenses. I put them on like a pair of glasses, and through them attempted to explore the interviews as though for the first time. I read and listened to the conversations with each participant one at a time, copying and pasting those excerpts that shed light on their experiences and interpretations of grief and loss through the particular lens I was wearing. Then, embodying the commitments and values of each perspective (admittedly simplifying them to a degree), I wrote my interpretation of their words as viewed through that lens, believing it with all my heart for that time. As described by Krueger, "I wrote freely, knowing that later I would come back and reshape my writing" (1997, p. 159). As mentioned previously, the artificial separation of perspectives into distinct lenses was only temporary. I felt that in order to try to understand the whole of the complicating way these discourses impacted my participants' interpretations of their losses, as well as my interpretations of their stories, it was necessary to look at the parts of the whole separately first (Kvale, 1996). Only then could I begin to understand how, in reality, they are so interconnected and see how they relate with and inform one another.

I have included some brief reflections between chapters (written in italicized font). The purpose of presenting this personal learning process in is threefold. First, it invites the reader to join in this process with me. The reader can consider these

reflections as landmarks that let the reader know what is coming next, and why. Second, these reflections represent my own learning throughout not only this research exploration, but my entire Masters program. By including them I felt I could own the process, rather than claiming it as any kind of generalization. However, I do hope that it strikes a chord with readers and reminds them that research is indeed conducted by living, breathing human beings with insecurities, hopes, and intentions. Finally, by including these ongoing reflections on my research I hope to illustrate the value of the hermeneutic perspective, which emphasizes all knowledge is interpretation, and how we interpret comes out of the ways we engage with the world. This is relevant not only as we study childhood loss, but as we (as practitioners) engage with those experiencing it.

The uncertainty portrayed in these intermittent reflections is not a fabrication. Particularly after I had written my first draft, I felt incredibly tentative about how to proceed. I knew that in order for me to truly walk my talk about collaborative and respectful relationships with participants, it was necessary for me to seek feedback from my participants. However, I felt very insecure when doing so. I made an offer to each of them to read the first draft if they were interested. They all accepted the offer, read the draft, and provided me with encouraging feedback. The feedback was incorporated into further drafts. Following their involvement in this study with me, they continue to take the experience even further for themselves. The three of them met together (with another brother) to informally discuss their experiences of participating in this research, and their childhood losses with each other – off the record. Where it goes now is up to them.

*

After conducting interviews with my participants, the time has come to start writing. I suddenly become overwhelmed with the amount of information for me to sift through⁹. Paralyzed with the enormity of the task at hand, I ask myself what exactly I hope to learn. I want to know how the three participants have come to interpret and experience their losses and subsequent grief. But how do I proceed?

I reflect for a long time on all I have previously learned about grief and loss from a developmental perspective, and how I heard it reflected in their stories during our interview conversations. I begin making notes ... drawing connections ... identifying patterns. Slowly, I feel, it is beginning to take form.

Their grief, I seem to be gleaning from their interviews, has a beginning, a middle, and an end; they described their grief as a process. And even in those times when they attempted to avoid that process or try to hide from it... the process found them anyway. It needs to run its course.

And so, I am able to understand their stories of grief and loss as a developmental process ...

*

⁹ Recalling the earlier description of what is known as the “hermeneutic circle”, (Kvale, 1996, p. 47), please consider this developing monologue an effort to engage in such a “back and forth process” on paper (p. 48).

The Lens of Developmental Psychology

During the interviews, I could not help but notice that all three of the participants describe their experiences in terms of a process. Even though they interpret and experience their losses differently, they also describe their “grief in normative, predictive stages” (Moules, 1998, p.143). This perspective “suggests that not only is grief ‘resolution’ possible but expected and normal” and can also be seen to “contribute to a sense of failure and incompetence” in coping with losses (p.144). Some of the elements that the participants identify as significant when I view their stories through this lens include age, attachment, grief as a universal process, and the significance of ‘external’ factors.

I will begin with the one that seems most evident: age. Age is relevant to their experiences in two ways. First, there is a shared assumption that as we develop over the life span, our cognitive, emotional, and other capacities change. Second, but very much related to the first, is the idea that grief reactions are largely determined by which stage of development a child is at when a loved one dies. That is, grief reactions are largely age-dependent.

The idea of age-based stages of development has been adapted and expanded on by a number of theorists, but generally speaking the assumption is that there are certain capabilities and behaviours demonstrated by children at certain points in their development. For instance, infancy is often described as the stage in which a child attaches to his or her caregiver and just begins to differentiate him- or herself from the environment, among other things. Childhood and adolescence are the next two stages, in

which the level of differentiation increases and both independence and a sense of autonomy develop (Taylor, 2004).

A model of this developmental process was put forth by Jean Piaget (In Craig, Kermis, & Digdon, 2002). He theorized that children go through four stages in their cognitive development. From birth to 18 months the stage is known as sensorimotor. During this time, infants know the world only through their actions, such as touching and looking. The preoperational stage is that which falls between two and seven years. During these years, children begin to use symbols (such as language), but still have difficulty understanding cause and effect as well as classifying objects and events. They often attribute such unexplainable phenomenon to magic (Craig, et al., 2002). Keep in mind Roy, the youngest of the three participants, had just turned eight when his parents died, thus, he was just exiting this stage at that time, just beginning to move into a concrete operational way of thinking.

Concrete operational is the stage from seven to ten years of age. At this point, children begin to think logically. They base their judgements not only on perceptions, but also on logic. They can classify and can understand mathematical concepts, as long as those concepts can be applied to something concrete. Cathy was at this stage during the time of her parents' deaths, and Harvey was just beginning to see the world in this way. The fourth stage is called formal operational, and occurs from twelve years old and beyond. It is during this stage that children learn to explore a multitude of possibilities and solutions, both concrete and abstract, and can project into the future (Craig, et al., 2002). Cathy was beginning to think along these lines when Betty, her sister, died.

While a lot of literature about grief addresses complex processes of meaning making, it seems that that which specifically addresses the grief of children seldom does. Instead, a lot of the knowledge generated about children's emotional responses to loss – particularly that which is intended for care providers - seems to have a foundation which is based in these age-based developmental stages (see Ayyash-Abdo, 2001; Newman, 1993; S.A.F.E.R. Counselling Service, n.d.). As stated by Saldinger, Porterfield, and Cain (2004), "... where youngsters are concerned, bereavement literature tends to focus on the more narrow task of helping children cognitively to grasp the concept of death, neglecting broader philosophical and pressing existential concerns" (p. 342). They go on to say that "meaning-making is complicated by age and cognitive development" (p. 342). As Harvey, Roy, and Cathy share their stories, it becomes clear that they, too, have made meaning of their losses in ways that reflect such developmental discourses to some degree. Not only that, but they interpret the losses as experienced by their older and younger siblings in these ways as well. Let me demonstrate this with a few examples:

The youngest child at the time their parents died was an infant. Here is what Harvey has to say about his understanding of his youngest brother's experience at that time:

In his case, he was so young, he didn't go through the trauma of losing his mother and his father and his brothers and his sisters. He went from an infant into a family. Do you know what I mean? I don't think the experience that he had would be nearly – when he was younger – would be nearly as traumatic for him as it was for us of the age of understanding. But I think as time went on and as he started to find out more and reflect back more, he started going through the same things that we went through at our age of understanding.¹⁰

¹⁰ Quotations from interviews have been edited slightly by eliminating pauses and repetition, as well as phrases such as "um", "ah", and "you know". Interviewer comments were omitted, in order to ease comprehension.

The oldest of the nine siblings was their sister, who was married with children. Cathy reflects on her sister's losses: "I mean Violet was married and living away from home when all this happened. And sure, it's affected her. But, I don't think she has the needs that I have ..." Cathy goes on to consider how age might have impacted the experiences of some of her other siblings: "And I think, with children, I mean Roy was only eight ... and Harvey was ten and, [brother] Nelson at fourteen. I mean that's a pretty vulnerable age. I think if there'd been someone to just comfort us and, well I don't know ..."

Clearly, then, age is seen as a significant element in how they have come to make meaning of their losses. I was fascinated to hear them describe their own emotional states during those times, and to see how they have in some ways embraced these developmental concepts in how they have made sense of them over time.

Let's start with Roy, who was barely eight, since he is the youngest of the three participants. As he tells his story, it is clear that even though he was capable of some understanding, it was largely based on his own perceptions and concrete experience. He portrays himself as though he was not able to deduce or reason abstractly. Moreover, he even demonstrated 'magical' notions of what was happening and why. He quite accurately represents himself as a typical child in a preoperational stage of cognitive development (Craig, et al., 2002).

For instance, when asked whether he knew about his mother's illness, Roy responds with this: "And I knew of my mother; I didn't know she had cancer. I knew that she had a bad arm. One arm was smaller than the other. She couldn't use her – I

don't know if it was her left or her right arm. Because [brother] Nelson used to make bread – I can remember Nelson used to make bread for her.”

Roy pieced together what was going on, not with abstract thought or logic, but based on his concrete observations and perceptions. So, yes, he knew his mother was sick. But no, he did not comprehend anything beyond what he saw himself. The same can be said in the case of his sister, Betty's illness. I asked him if he remembered her being sick:

“No. No. I remember her – a dog ... something about a dog bit her. And she had to go in hospital. And then I went with Aunt Nora I do believe, and then [oldest sister] Violet came up [from Newfoundland] and got me.”

As a child, Roy struggled to understand the cause and effect, and in so doing, demonstrated an understanding of the world generally held by children around that age (Craig, et al., 2002). He remembers the events as they impacted his life; he remembers the bits and pieces that help him to make sense of what he was experiencing. He talks about events, not reasons; concrete experiences, not abstract ideas.

After he moved to Halifax events seemed to happen one on top of the other; Roy sounds almost dizzy trying to make sense of it all. It is at this point that he shares his previously held magical sense of what was happening:

It's not clear. I can't remember how long I stayed with Aunt Elsie; I know I stayed with Aunt Elsie and Harvey for a little while but I can't remember it. And I don't know if I stayed with Aunt Allie before Aunt Nora. Or Aunt Nora and [sister] Betty – it was all mixed up.

I was so amazed with the place and everything was new. Everything was new. And it was so new that ... I wasn't settled. So if someone told me a fantastic thing, I wouldn't be surprised because everything was new; everything was new. Like I remember the first time I was in Florida [as an adult], everything was different.

Different fish, different birds, ... different flowers, different trees, different sounds, different people. Everything was different. And, so, if you saw a person with two heads, you wouldn't think much of it, you know? It was too much. And that's why it was no big shock. And I'm sure if Dad would have come home, they would've found Dad, I wouldn't have been super surprised. 'Cause everything was fast, and new things. Everything was new, new, new, new, new. And, just in a blur, you know?

What Roy was experiencing was, to him at that time, supernatural. So for him to imagine something even more supernatural taking place wasn't much of a stretch. In fact, many grief scholars state that children at the preoperational stage of cognitive development often believe that death is reversible (Ayyash-Abdo, 2001), just as Roy suggests in the example above. He did not understand the finality, nor the universality, of death.

Harvey, the middle of the three participants in age, who was just a little older than Roy, was at the age of a concrete operational way of understanding the world when his losses began to occur. In other words, he was developing an ability to think logically, though limited to areas in which he could apply his abstractions to concrete objects and events. As a result, even though he was still very much making sense of the world through his own personal experiences, Harvey was a little more able to draw connections than was his younger brother, Roy, at that time:

It was mind boggling. And to me it was like, you've lost your mother and your father and all your brothers and sisters, 'cause now I'm alone. And, at ten years of age - I'd just turned ten - this was overwhelming. It was scary. It was really, really scary.

I don't ever remember before that ever being afraid of the dark. I mean, you know when we were back home, there was no street lights or anything like that; we just walked around in the dark. It was no big deal. Nothing like that ever scared us. That wasn't a big deal, I mean, we grew up in that, you know? I mean we used to go to Long Harbour and sleep outside. That wasn't a big deal. It wasn't. Now, all of a sudden it was a big deal to be in the dark.

Yeah. And so I'd wake up in cold sweats, and I'd wake up – I started wetting the bed when I was, um...I never had a problem with that until after moving to Halifax. And a lot of it had to do with the fact that I actually knew that I had to pee but I was afraid to get out of bed.

Harvey, it seems, was beginning to fear for himself. Even though he did not fully understand what it meant, he may have been beginning to develop a sense of death as universal, which means he understood on some level that death was something that would happen to him, as well. This realization is a very significant aspect of grieving for children who are in the concrete operational stage of development (Ayyash-Abdo, 2002). For instance, here is how Harvey describes his experience of his sister's illness before her death in 1957:

My sister Betty, I remember she had lung cancer and she had lumps on her as a result of the cancer. And I can remember going home that night after seeing her in the hospital, getting in the bathtub and my whole body was covered in lumps. I mean literally, I could feel lumps all over my body. I remember that. Scared the living daylights right out of me.

And I said to [guardian] Aunt Elsie, I got out of the bathtub and I said, 'Aunt Elsie, I got lumps all over my body.' She said, 'There's no lumps on your body.' I said, 'My body's full of lumps. How can you not see that? I can feel'em.' Oh, yeah. I can remember that. Yeah. I would've been eleven then.

As an eleven year old, Harvey may not have grasped that his sister had cancer or what that word meant. But he knew enough to realize that he was not necessarily exempt from the illness that was in the process of taking her life. Understandably, this frightened him, and he can still quite vividly recall the impact this had on him.

Cathy, the oldest of the three interview participants, was eleven when her parents died and twelve when her sister died. Her shift from concrete operational to formal operational thought patterns can be observed quite clearly, if one is inclined to view her story in this way. For instance, when her parents died, she had just turned eleven, and

was making sense of what was happening in a way that began incorporating logic, but only as it applied to things she could observe concretely. Consider the following examples:

In November [of 1955], all of a sudden one night, it seems, ... I can see this crowd of people in our kitchen talking about my father's boat being lost. And, then my mother was taken to hospital. And I can see them physically carrying her out of the house. I don't know. I doubt very much that it happened that same day, but my memory says: these people came in, talked about my father's boat being missing, my mother is taken to the hospital. It made no sense. At that time it made no sense. I could not understand why my mother had to go to the hospital because my father's boat was missing.

When we lived in the north end of Halifax, I guess when it finally hit me, or when it was finally told to me, or when I finally realized, 'My parents are gone.' I didn't used to like to stay alone in the house in the evening because I was afraid there would be a knock on the door and it would be my father.

It's those years in Halifax that - I mean, I was eleven through almost sixteen. They were pretty impressionable years. And that's the years that I don't remember being happy.

In fact I called Jean [cousin, daughter of aunt and uncle guardians in Halifax] last week and asked her what I was like, and she said, 'You were a sad little girl.' I asked Jean what I was like after my mother died. I said, 'Did I talk about it?' And she said, 'You just cried.'

Cathy comprehended that some immense losses had taken place. She was a sad little girl, and like her brother Harvey, she was frightened. Even now, her eyes well up as she speaks of this point in her life. But although she could tell there were things going on beneath the surface, she had a difficult time piecing them together. She could not quite make sense of such abstract things. It didn't add up. Her behaviour was quite typical of a grieving child at that stage of life; reclusivity is a common reaction (Newman, 1993).

A year after her mother's death, when her sister Betty died, she was more able to grasp the enormity of the situation. She could consider possibilities, draw links, project into the future, deduce certain things; she was beginning to exhibit formative operational

capabilities. While this helped her understanding of the events and their consequences, it also amplified the pain of the losses in some ways:

Sometimes I think my sister's death created more losses than my parents'. I think it was more devastating. There was more loss.

Because she had [little brother] Kent, and Kent went to live with [cousin] Josie and Allie, which was still in the family. But when he became 12 or 13 they agreed with him that they would adopt him and he changed his name which makes sense. So we lost Kent - lost Junior - as a brother, and we lost [baby brother] Warren. We lost Warren big time.

After my sister died, when my sister was sick, Warren went to live with my Aunt Nora. And two months after my sister died, that aunt died. And then he went to live with [cousin] Josie. But we knew that that was temporary. I remember Josie lived just down over the hill from us. And I remember one time being down there, and they talking about, you know, what was to become of Warren. And they were talking about putting him up for adoption. And I was twelve years old. And I remember walking back up the hill thinking, 'Everybody else has a place to live, but I'm only twelve years old, and I can't do anything.' [tears].

And I knew it was wrong that this baby had to go live with somebody else. And I remember saying to somebody, and I don't know who it was, 'Somebody should be able to do something.' But there was nobody left to do anything. And maybe because for two months I cared for that baby, you know, it was my baby [tears]. And now, all of a sudden he's going to be adopted?

So, you know, it just seems, after my sister died it seemed worse.

Here Cathy shows a much deeper level of understanding. She grasps not only what is directly affecting her, and not only what she sees happening around her, but also demonstrates an ability to think about multiple possibilities and their presumed consequences.

The impact of cognitive development on the grief of eight year old Roy, ten year old Harvey, and eleven year old Cathy is a significant part of these stories, and the meaning they hold for all three participants. They experienced the same deaths, yes. But they experienced them very differently. And their ages at the time of the losses can, to

some extent, help to explain those differences, as many theorists have established (Ayyash-Abdo, 2001; Kubler-Ross, 1983; Murray, 2001).

I did mention earlier that age was not the only thread I heard weaving itself through their stories as they talked. Linked to these developmental theories is the concept of attachment. To ignore attachment in this conversation would be an oversight, to say the least. Let me first give you a brief background on the theory as it relates to grief and loss.

John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth are the key figures in the development and advancement of attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1978). Due to his conviction that early attachment is a significant factor when it comes to all relationships throughout life, Bowlby developed his own phasic model of grief following the death of a loved one (Field, Gao, & Paderna, 2005). He saw grief reactions as a response to the removal of an attachment figure, and all bereavement processes as efforts to re-establish proximity to the deceased.

The first phase of Bowlby's model is identified as the "protest phase" in which the bereaved person may, for example, claim to actually see the deceased in a crowd, or may have a difficult time getting rid of the belongings of the deceased because there is a belief on the "deeper organismic level" that the deceased will return (Field, et al., 2005, p. 281). In the next phase, despair, the bereaved "has not given up the goal to re-establish physical proximity to the deceased," even though the permanence of the separation may be understood (p.282). Finally, the "reorganizational phase" (p.284) is seen as the beginning of grief resolution, as the attachment goal of re-establishing physical proximity

with the deceased is replaced with the goal of establishing “psychological proximity” which matches “the new life situation” (p.284), but still acknowledges the impact of attachment on all relationships, even when a person is bereaved.

I am speaking of attachment specifically because of the complex process each participant describes when it comes to accepting the finality of their father’s death. All three of them describe a sense of the possibility that their father would return after his ship was lost at sea in November of 1955. As Cathy says, “And I was always afraid that he was alive somewhere and he had amnesia and didn’t know where any of us were. And [he] would go back to Grand Bank [Newfoundland] and there’d be nobody there. And that was with me for a long, long time.”

Their mother was buried at a cemetery in St. John’s, Newfoundland. When Cathy reflects on this she says of her father (who has no gravestone or monument of his own to date), “his name is on her tombstone and ‘Lost at sea, November, 1955.’ For a long time that used to bother me because I used to think, ‘supposing he came back one time and saw that there?’”

Roy shares a similar experience:

I was expecting him to walk in the door any time at all [after the loss of his ship], which he did from time to time. You know, you’d lose contact with him. This was my perception: You’d lose contact with him, no big deal, he’ll turn up. And that kept going on for, well, the possibility of him coming back never stopped. And even if I, half asleep and half awake now, not being conscious enough to reason with yourself, ... Not so much right now, today, but in recent years, the possibility of me opening my eyes and Dad coming around the corner is there.

This would be a typical initial reaction to such a personal loss, according to John Bowlby’s attachment theory (Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe, 1992). Harvey not

only imagined it was possible, but he actually believed he saw his father from time to time, for up to forty years of his life:

Remember when I said about seeing Dad walk out the door with his brown leather jacket on and a bald head? I lived with that from the time I was ten 'til the time I was fifty. I would walk down the street, I would go down Barrington Street and see a man with a brown leather jacket with a bald head and think, 'I wonder if that's my father.'

And this wasn't something that just every once in a while happened. This happened continually for me, for forty years. It's amazing, ... it's hard to explain. It wasn't like, every once in a while I'd be walking down the street and see somebody with a brown leather jacket and a bald head. It wasn't every once in a while. It was a continual thing. Yeah, it was. It was a – and I hate to use the word a distraction, because I kind of enjoyed it.

According to Bowlby's theory, Harvey spent forty years of his life in the first phase of grief – the protest phase. That is, he was unwilling to break the bonds with his deceased father in order to adjust to the loss, which is something Bowlby believed to be necessary. Until he was fifty, he did not find a way of renegotiating his relationship with his father to allow for psychological proximity, rather than physical proximity (Stroebe, et al., 1992).

When I was fifty years old ... I was at a men's retreat and I woke up 2:30 in the morning crying uncontrollably, mourning the loss of my father. It was a church retreat camp that I was at, and the subject was a 'fathers and sons' theme. And so the fathers took their sons. Of course I was there without a son, because I don't have a son. But in my mind, it kept reflecting back to the father and the son thing, right? I went to bed that night not thinking about it a whole lot – not consciously thinking about it a whole lot. But subconsciously it must've been really bothering me. And I wasn't dreaming, I wasn't having a nightmare, it was none of that. I just woke up 2:30, and when I woke up, I realized I was crying, uncontrollably. And all I could think about was that I was getting some kind of a closure. I thought that way. And since that day, I haven't had that issue with the brown leather jacket and the bald head.

Harvey established a shift in which he ceased craving physical proximity to his deceased father. This is seen by attachment theorists as a necessary part of working through grief.

The above theories of human cognition and attachment (which primarily have been developed in western contexts) are not the only perspectives that support the idea of grief being a developmental process. In fact, the idea of grief as a linear, time-limited process is a recurrent theme in much of the literature I have encountered, although it is articulated in various ways (see Ayyash-Abdo, 2001; Bonanno, Papa, Lalande, Zhang, & Noll, 2005; Cohen & Mannarino, 2004; Murray, 2001; and others). Often this process is described as one involving “stages” or “phases” (Steeves, 2002, p. 2). William Worden attempts to move away from viewing grief as a linear process by describing a “four-task model of mourning” (in Murray, 2001, p. 222). However, although he refers to tasks rather than phases the process he describes can still be seen as linear since the final task involves establishing a sense of normalcy in a life without the lost object – a task very similar in description to Bowlby’s phase of “reorientation” (p. 222).

Even though it may not necessarily be their intent, researchers from a wide variety of theoretical perspectives tend to present grief as a universal, “contained, time-limited event having both an obvious beginning and an end point” (Murray, 2001, p. 224). Not surprisingly then, so do Cathy, Harvey and Roy.

As I listen to them talk, it becomes clear that each of them sees their experiences with grief as something they need to ‘go through.’ In fact, each participant discusses in detail a desire for ‘closure’ to their losses, although this was not a concept I introduced

with any of my questions. They feel there has been a progression to their grieving experiences, and it is a necessary process. They also seem to communicate that this process, although in many ways unique to every individual, is something that is inevitable. To embrace it allows it to happen sooner and more comfortably. To avoid it simply postpones necessary healing. In other words, even though on the one hand they describe their experiences as quite personal, on the other hand they seem to hold some presupposition (Fairclough, 1992) that this grief process they describe is, to some degree, universal. Let me share it with you in their words, to illustrate this point.

Harvey draws a very vivid analogy to express his ideas about the grieving process he experienced (and is experiencing):

Let's visualize a totally dark room, and you've got a dimmer switch, and you're slowly turning it to bright until finally you're at the end of the thing and it becomes a real bright room. You know what I mean? I think that's probably the best way for me to express it to you. It started out really dark over here and all of a sudden it's started to get brighter and brighter and brighter. I'm pretty close to a bright room. It's different now. My thoughts are different. My memories are different. I'm a more open, I'm more open about it. It's kind of neat, really. It's kind of a lot of fun.

But, according to Harvey, that room could not have brightened up until he experienced some kind of closure:

I think it's very, very difficult to get closure. Here's what bothers me sometimes: What bothers me is that it was important to me to have closure for my father, 'cause I didn't see the body, but yet I didn't see my mother's body either. And I never had an issue with closure with that. And I think the reason was, I got a chance to say good-bye.

To me, now that I've experienced that closure [with both parents] myself, now I think I'm able to sit down and talk about it as a family. I'm not so sure that I could have done that as openly before as I can now ... 'Cause I'm telling you, it's an awful painful thing to go through. The hurt of the whole thing never ever goes away. You just learn to deal with it differently.

I think every time you share, every time you do that, it helps you. I think that's why I was excited about doing this because ... I just think every time you do that it's a big thing. I think once you come to grips with this sort of thing, I think you want to talk about it then. Because you got over the hurdle, because there's a big hurdle to get over initially.

Harvey sees his experience with grief as a progression. Although he does not use the words phases or stages necessarily, he does imply that there is a series of experiences that he has followed – and continues to follow – one after the other. And to him, closure is a key part of that experience. Closure as Harvey describes it sounds much like Bowlby's 'reorientation' and Worden's final 'task'.

Roy echoes Harvey's sentiments. He sees his lack of closure for so many years as a major obstacle that stood in the way of grieving the death of his father:

A good part of grieving and a good part of closure is having a funeral. A funeral is a good way for closure. And I've been to some wonderful funerals where there's kind words said about this person. But with Mom and Dad there were not. There wasn't one word that I heard. I wasn't part of any funeral for either one. That would've, that would, you know. It's like getting ready for something and ... It's like running out of the door with your coat open and no mitts on and you're not prepared.

It's messy. Unfinished. And it would've put closure. It's over, and this proves it's over; we had a funeral. That proves that my mother is dead and she is buried. But there was no funeral for me to attend. And there was no funeral for Dad – and for Dad it was ongoing for years and years and years.

There seems to be some desire for this process to end – or change, or develop. But without closure, it is felt by all three of these siblings, they are stuck in the pain of the loss, unable to move forward in the process. Cathy also feels the way her brothers do regarding closure:

Even now, at the age I am now, sometimes I think, 'I should not be feeling some of these needs that I have.' I should be past them at my age. I mean there are certain things you outgrow. But I guess if a need hasn't been fulfilled then you're not going to outgrow it, are you?

I think people need to use the words death and dying and talk about it. Not just pretend if you don't talk about it, it'll go away. It doesn't go away. It might not've been until I saw my father's name on my mother's tombstone, which was in 1960 [approximately five years after their deaths], that I realized. And I may not have realized it then, because I remember thinking, 'Supposing he comes back and sees that.'

I think closure is a good thing because I feel almost the same way about my mother's death as I do about my father's. I don't have the memories of my parents, and I think you need that for closure. You can get on with it and not be haunted with these feelings that I have: a sadness, a loss, there's something missing ... there's a loss. And maybe, if as a family, if we'd been together more, and the ones who have the memories talked about what life was like or you know, just things. Maybe it would help. But that hasn't happened. That's why I think if my sister and my brothers and I could just talk, that everybody would feel, 'I'm not the only one who feels this way' and we won't be always searching for something.

All three of them talk in very general terms about this process – they are speaking of their own experience, but believe it to be similar among each other, and among other people who were bereaved as children. As a result, each of them sees open dialogue as an avenue through which this journey can be experienced in a more positive way, a route by which they can finally feel that the process is no longer, as Roy says, unfinished.

I must add that the participants in these interviews endured some very unusual circumstances. As a result, it is to be expected that their experiences of loss will not seamlessly follow such predictable patterns as have been outlined so far. Most research on grief and loss acknowledges that there are complicating factors that must be taken into account when making sense of loss. Things such as the social context of the loss (including social support as well as cultural understandings and family context), multiple losses, past experiences with loss, and the type of death that occurred (Ayyash-Abdo, 2001; Eberle, 2005; Field, et al, 2004; Murray, 2001) can be considered complicating factors.

By all accounts, the losses explored in these interviews were subject to many such complicating factors. The three participants constantly reiterate the significance of so many losses having occurred over a short period of time, of no one knowing the details about their father's death or seeing his body, and of the lack of social supports in place. As Harvey so succinctly puts it, "It wasn't a normal childhood, I mean you wouldn't expect it to be a normal childhood, 'cause it wasn't normal – nothing normal about it." I would like to look at these factors one by one.

It seems that for all three of them, the confusion around their father's death is a very important consideration when they try to make meaning of their losses. Roy says, "Seeing his body ... knowing where he is, what happened to him. Yeah, I'd like to know. I'd like to know for sure. But, ah, I don't say anyone would ever know now for sure." He laments the circumstances of his father's death: "There was no funeral for Dad – and it was ongoing for years and years and years." All three of them, as I mentioned earlier, spent not only years, but decades, entertaining the possibility that their father might return. There was no proof that he had died: no body, no details, and no grave.

On top of that open end were the multiple losses that took place over the years that followed: their mother's death; their sister's death; and their dispersion among relatives and away from Newfoundland, each other, and their other siblings. Harvey explains it like this: "When we lost our parents, we lost our parents and we lost our brothers and our sisters. It all happened basically over night. The whole thing didn't just revolve around losing your parents. There's so much more involved in this thing, you know, with your brothers and sisters and everything else. It was just a whole gamut of

things for a lot of years.” By the time his sister died a year after his mother’s death,

Harvey was eleven, and already felt he could take no more loss:

You know this is terrible to say this, but I remember when she died. I guess I was so hardened to it by then that it didn’t hit me as hard as it would’ve if I hadn’t been. Oh, it’s true. I had put a shell around myself, I said, ‘This ain’t gonna hurt me no more. I’ve had enough hurt.’ Isn’t that awful? But it’s true. It’s just being honest with you. I think I put a shell around myself. I just, ah, I got myself preoccupied with other things.

Roy can relate: “And the fact that Dad was lost and Mom was lost, was just two other things. And they’re not big significant things in the whole scheme. But it’s just two more things to be thrown in the mish mash. You were just numb. Numb. That’s the word for it. Numb. Because there were so many changes.”

So here we have a family of children dealing not only with difficult circumstances surrounding the death of their father, but also multiple losses. And there’s more. The social context in which those losses occurred did not, in the minds of these three individuals, provide the support that was required to overcome these challenges. Cathy describes the years that followed these deaths in light of this complicating factor:

For five years, five very impressionable years, I lived with people who didn’t want me¹¹ and I think that has a lot to do with how I am.

There was nobody. And I used to get really upset about that lots of times because there’s nobody to talk to [*tears*]. There’s nobody to share things with. There’s nobody to go home to.

Maybe in those days there was no support group, you know.

This sounds very similar to Harvey’s experience following the losses:

¹¹ In saying this, Cathy is referring only to the aunt and uncle she lived with at that time. She wishes to point out that she felt very valued by their daughter, Jean, to whom she says she owes a lot. Although times were difficult during those five years, Cathy is grateful for having had the opportunity to be raised by family rather than an orphanage, which she knew to be a possibility. Roy and Harvey also express in our interviews together that they appreciate having been raised by family members.

When you go from the age of ten to the age of 21 and not have a family, it really makes it difficult. When your name is different in school than the names of the people that are raising you, it's difficult. When you refer to your aunt and uncle as your guardians as opposed to your parents when you're ten years old, that's difficult. When you have someone in their fifties raising a ten year old boy that's already raised their own family, that's difficult too.

Roy, although he felt very loved by his sister Violet, who raised him, believes that people at that time, in that place, simply did not talk about emotional things with children. He, too, feels there was no one with whom he could express his feelings:

Yeah. After my parents died, they – I don't know. It was kind of not talked about. I don't know if I was held back? Maybe they used to say, 'Don't talk about Wilson and Thelma [father and mother] now when the youngsters are here' or something like that. Maybe. I can hear them, I could imagine them saying something like that, you know.

See there was never any talk about it. No one talked about it. No one talked about it to me. No one sat me down and said, 'Your father is drowned and your mother is dead and they're not coming back.' No one ever told me that. You kind of piece it together.

So, on top of everything else, they experienced their multiple, deep, confusing losses ... alone.

*

I am satisfied, and relieved. That was actually quite an interesting process. It really taught me a lot. I get up from my computer, have a good stretch, and walk into the kitchen. Ahhh.

Somehow, something in me feels slightly unsettled. What is it? I did my homework, put together the pieces, and it makes sense. I'm finished.

But clearly I'm not. I feel something inside me working its way to the surface. I occupy myself with a small stack of dishes. But there's no ignoring it – it is making itself heard.¹²

"I don't disagree entirely" the voice inside me says. "It's just that, well, I don't think you started early enough, or looked widely enough. You're looking at this all as though it began in November, 1955, and as though their experiences were entirely individual processes. But that's not what I heard the participants saying. I think it's impossible to tell these stories without considering the contexts in which they occurred."

Fair statement, I think.

The voice continues, "I would like to back up a little, widen our gaze to include not only that family, and not only those years. Their losses happened in a time and a place. And that time and place plays a role in how those losses are experienced by Cathy, Harvey, and Roy. There's simply no avoiding that."

I leave the dishes. Return to the computer. I realize it is not finished, and I am intrigued.

I really want to understand how they make meaning of their childhood losses. And so, I begin to consider their stories of grief and loss in context ...

*

¹² To help clarify my intentions in including multiple voices in this process, I will refer to Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich (2005) who says, "We are challenged to immerse ourselves in what we are studying, to suspend judgement for a while, to learn to hear new voices, and hence to emerge with new definitions and concepts and judgements that are, again, finer, more complex, more subtle, and so better suited to the interrelated worlds in which we live" (p. 267).

The Lens of Culture and Context

I am going to begin with a song: 'The Ode to Newfoundland':

When sun rays crown thy pine-clad hills
 And Summer spreads her hand,
 When silvern voices tune thy rills,
 We love thee, smiling land.
 We love thee; we love thee.
 We love thee smiling land.

When spreads thy cloak of shimmering white
 At Winter's stern command,
 Thro' shortened day and starlit night,
 We love thee, frozen land.
 We love thee; we love thee.
 We love thee, frozen land.

When blinding storm gusts fret thy shore
 And wild waves lash thy strand.
 Thro' sprindrift swirl and tempest roar,
 We love thee, wind-swept land.
 We love thee; we love thee.
 We love thee wind-swept land.

As loved our fathers, so we love.
 Where once they stood, we stand.
 Their prayers we raise to heaven above.
 God guard thee, Newfoundland.
 God guard thee; God guard thee.
 God guard thee, Newfoundland.

If we are talking about the significance of context on their experiences of loss, then a logical way to begin is to develop some understanding of the time and place in which those losses occurred. And in my view, this Ode provides a platform for doing that. As stated so powerfully by Paulo Wangoola (2006), "In solving problems, we draw lessons not from the unknown or from the future, but from history. This is why we need to go to our history to look for guidance in building a new world ..." (p. 120).

The 'Ode to Newfoundland' was written by an Englishman named Sir Cavendish Boyle in 1904 who, at that time, was Governor of Newfoundland. It was set to music written by Sir Hubert Parry, and became Newfoundland's national anthem in 1907. It remained so until 1949, when Newfoundland joined confederation with Canada. The Ode to Newfoundland did not leave the consciousness of Newfoundlanders, and even today it is sung by communities at functions at least as frequently as is 'O Canada.' In fact, in 1980 it was officially readopted as Newfoundland's provincial anthem, making Newfoundland the only province in Canada to have its own anthem (Wikipedia, 2007).

These days, descendants of British and Irish immigrants in Newfoundland "view themselves as Newfoundlanders first and foremost, but it took centuries for that common identity to be forged" (Gregory, 2004, p. 1). The Ode to Newfoundland was one tool by which that shift occurred. At the time when it was written, there was not much of a common identity in Newfoundland. The Beothuk people, Newfoundland's original inhabitants, had become extinct due to disease and slaughter (Bergman, 1997). Most communities thus consisted of either French or Irish immigrants and their offspring. By this time the term 'Newfoundlanders' had been adopted, however, and "Newfoundlanders had [recently] emerged as an identifiable group" (Rompkey, 2006, p. 64).

Newfoundlanders were gradually becoming characterized by "identifiable peculiarities of pronunciation and idiom, of song, proverb, and folk tale" (Rompkey, 2005, p. 64). Eventually not only their behaviour, but their very nature was seen as a product of their being 'Newfoundlanders.' Credited to their English and Irish roots that were seen to provide a "blend of endurance and imaginativeness" (p. 65), and to their

struggles with the rugged land, Newfoundlanders were slowly coming to define themselves as a distinct group of people. They were said to be “creative and constructive”, “adaptable and independent” (p. 66), and to value and produce rich traditions, folklore, and folk music, resulting in a distinctive culture (Rompkey, 2006).

By the 1920s, Newfoundland’s many outport communities still had little or no contact with one another, and were still home to people whose lifestyles and patterns largely reflected those of their ancestral origins (Gregory, 2004). But the Newfoundland government, mainly through tourism initially, was aiming to capitalize on the above images. The first step was, of course, to convince Newfoundlanders themselves of their truth. However, even if accomplishing that task was feasible, without an “authoritative voice within the imperial context”, Newfoundland would still struggle to promote itself and progress in the direction it had hoped (Rompkey, 2006, p. 66).

Thus, between the first and second world wars, “a Newfoundland national identity was in gestation, but it had yet to be born” (Gregory, 2004, p. 19). It was through a great deal of political initiative coming from the governmental and business powers in St. John’s that this shared identity was to emerge. Such initiatives made use of the images described above in order to “distinguish it from its past and establish it as a place” (Rompkey, 2006, p. x). In other words, there was an idea of what Newfoundland identity and culture should be, and that image was being propagated in many ways.

By the late 1940s “nationalism was clearly a major force in Newfoundland politics and culture” (Gregory, 2004, p.5). Interestingly, it was Joseph Smallwood who fostered and commodified the Newfoundland national identity and who brought

Newfoundland into confederation with Canada at that time. It was in 1949 that Newfoundland, under Smallwood's leadership, officially let its flag and anthem go, in exchange for a place and a voice, it was hoped, within Canada.

The Newfoundland identity, however, did not slip away with its flag. Now Newfoundland was faced with a challenge that was quite unique. Being "the only province with both a pre-Confederation and a post-Confederation consciousness" it faced the struggle of knowing how to present itself as a society with over 500 years of documented history that was now joined with another (Rompkey, 2006, p. x). Noteworthy, too, is the fact that upon its introduction to Canada, Newfoundland became seen by the rest of Canada as a 'Maritime province', and thus "found its identity submerged in a region that had already congealed in the Canadian vocabulary" (Conrad, 2002, p. 161). Suddenly the difficulty of forging a strength-based perception of the place (both within and about Newfoundland) was heightened, as the rest of the country immediately identified Newfoundland as another 'have-not' province. By the 1960s, "political economy, migration patterns, scholarship, and the mass media converged ... to construct an unflattering image of Atlantic Canadians" (Conrad, 2002, p. 163).

With that, the efforts to instil a strong sense of identity within Newfoundlanders became increasingly important, and tourism, academia, the arts, and folk culture continued their roles as political tools for the government of Newfoundland and Labrador (Rompkey, 2006). An image that served to differentiate Newfoundland from its neighbours was marketed, in the hopes of establishing a sense of patriotism, strength, and unity among Newfoundlanders.

The image is that which is painted by the words in the Ode to Newfoundland. It is one of a rugged, harsh, but beautiful landscape that, with a little ingenuity and hard work, provides all that one might need. It is one that encourages loyalty in the face of adversity, faith in God, connection to generations past, and an eagerness to work hard, to contribute, and to take over where past generations left off. It is an image that emphasizes unity - a collective 'we'- and a shared responsibility for each other and the land itself. These are some of the messages reinforced in the minds of Newfoundlanders each time they so passionately sang (and continue to sing) the Ode.

Of course, there is another side to these qualities and characteristics that have come to define Newfoundland and its people. Just as the harsh living conditions and pride in hard work may be celebrated as a source of strength, they may also contribute to a certain pragmatism that can at times be felt and interpreted as insensitive and even short-sighted. For instance, when researching the circumstances around the loss of his father's ship thirty years after the fact, Warren (the youngest brother) was met with a great deal of resistance from the Newfoundlanders he questioned – family members and otherwise. There was a desire to let bygones be bygones and to simply focus on what needed to be done to carry on. Asking questions, challenging authority, and allowing negative feelings to surface seemed to be avoided at all costs (MacPhail, 1992). This was another dimension of the cultural world in which my participants experienced their losses and grief.

I will stop here with Newfoundland history, as I am sure you are wondering at this point why I chose to share that. I am not entirely disagreeing with what has already been

said about the experiences of loss among our participants. But I believe it is worth considering an alternative perspective. Some researchers are resistant to embrace the developmental perspective outlined earlier. Carolyn Wainryb (2004), for instance, chooses not to see age, but “culture as the main source of development – the origin and organizer of the self, emotion, cognition, and values” (p. 131). Knowlden and Hopkins Kavanagh (2004) echo this assertion by identifying culture as the key aspect of human adaptability. Indeed, even though age-based developmental stages are based in empirical evidence (Bonnano, 2001; Saldinger, Porterfield, & Cain, 2004), where, when, and by whom this evidence is defined and gathered makes it subjective and rooted in particular traditions all the same. Thus, making universal claims about children and their processes and failing to locate these claims in culture, history, and even political context is at best negligent, and at worst damaging (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

Perhaps it is timely to now remind you that Cathy was born in 1944, Harvey in 1945, and Roy in 1947: pre-Confederate Newfoundlanders, all of them. It was into this changing, forward-looking, revolutionary time in Newfoundland’s history that they were born. It was a time when a sense of belonging and contributing to something larger than oneself was considered not only a priority, but a part of being a Newfoundlander. During the early years of their childhoods, Newfoundland joined Canada, no longer a nation of its own. Nationalistic pride abounded, the shared identity of Newfoundlanders as a “special race of people” prevailed (Rompkey, 2006, p. 70).

While I am very aware that the words ‘culture’¹³ and ‘identity’ are slippery terms and “so freighted with meaning that they risk losing their value as analytical tools” (Conrad, 2002, p. 160), I do feel it is important to address the influence of context and social relations on individual experiences. We cannot view “individual and cultural processes as separate entities” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 44). It is those dimensions of Roy, Cathy, and Harvey’s experiences of loss I will focus on here. Do they identify with the qualities outlined in the images above? Do they see themselves as Newfoundlanders, first and foremost? And does this have any bearing on how they make sense of their childhood losses?

Roy describes how he responded to their harsh living conditions during his childhood in rural Newfoundland. As he does, I see evidence of that resilient, resourceful Newfoundlander that was articulated as far back as the end of the nineteenth century (Rompkey, 2006). Not only did he make do with what little they had, but he did so happily:

By today’s standards we were poor. We were very poor. You know, we just had enough to live. I used to get a nickel a day. And that was fine, that was. You weren’t worse off than the guy next door.

But I thought all the time that I was lucky. For instance, there’s people in work, who work in the industry, that are never happy with their work. Well, I could be happy shovelling shit. If that was the hand I was dealt, I’ll play with that hand. I think it’s just the way you are.

13 Defining culture is becoming an increasingly difficult thing to do. While much of the literature I consult addresses culture, definitions are hard to come by (Hoskins, 2003; Rogoff, 2003; Stroebe *et al*, 1992). My dictionary defines culture, in the sense used here, as “the mode of behaviour within a particular group” (Bisset, 2002, p.231) but drawing lines around groups seems to be where the difficulty lies. None of us belong to only one, so while we may in some ways share cultural experiences, in other ways we will differ culturally. As groups and individuals have more than one dimension and change over time, I will not strive towards a concise definition of culture, but will accept this as a limitation of language (a cultural construction itself) as I continue to explore. When appropriate, I will lean towards use of the word ‘contexts’ over cultures, as it seems less rigid in its implication, and allows for involvement in multiple, and changing, relational worlds.

Harvey, too, sees hard work and making due as qualities that are part of the lineage from which he came:

Any picture I have of my mom she's got an apron on. She's working in the kitchen. And any picture I have of my dad ... he's up there working on that boat stripping down the motor. Or down on the wharf gutting a fish. I never saw them where they weren't working hard. My grandfather, same thing ... So, I mean I look at all that and I see the generations that have gone on before me were hard, hard working people. And man, I've got it pretty easy.

I value that big time. I think just tough, real, hardworking people with a lot of compassion for what they do, and compassion for their families. And I remember that toughness, but I also remember the tenderness of the family ... So I think there's a lot to be said about that. I think we're a hard-nosed, hard working breed of people who have a lot of emotion and a lot of sentiment. But because of our tough exterior we don't express it the way that we should.

The detail Cathy gives as she shares her story further conveys these images.

People did what they needed to do in order to survive in difficult circumstances.

Questioning and challenging this way of living in the world was simply not done. This is how she describes her life in Stone's Cove and Grand Bank, before her parents died:

I did a lot of the household things and I did a lot of baby things, so I didn't have a lot of time for friends, I guess. I spent more days at home than I did in school. I was in grade six. And I don't remember it bothering me.

I don't remember seeing my mother do [leisure] things. I mean, she had a big family so most of the things she did, well everything she did was for survival, 'cause she was literally a single mother. My father was away most of the time.

You know, just take things as they come, and don't ask why.

Cathy also seems to share the belief that character is something that is inherited from generations past:

When I was doing that lighthouse for [sister] Violet, when I was [rug]hooking that, I called [father's sister, only living aunt] Aunt Wendy, because that [*pointing to the photograph used as a template*] was coloured. It was a black and white picture and somebody coloured it. I wanted to make sure I had the colours right. So I called Aunt Wendy and told her what I was doing and told her I wanted the colours. And she told me she used to hook. I said, 'But Mom didn't, did she?' And she said,

'Oh yes, Cathy,' she said, 'your mother used to hook rugs all the time.' I didn't know that. And I do it. And I know so very little about either one of them, you know? But um, I think they must've been terrific people because I think we're OK.

My brothers have senses of humour – beautiful senses of humour, all of them, really, in their own way. But apparently my father had a really good sense of humour.

To some degree, Roy, Harvey, and Cathy all identify with the image of Newfoundlanders in ways that have been perpetuated over the years: strong, hardworking, adaptable, and creative. In addition, they see those qualities as somehow being inherent aspects of their identities. What are the implications of these identity images on their experiences of the deaths of their parents and sister, and their separation from each other?

Those who research grief are increasingly recognizing the significance of contextual experiences, including history, politics, social and familial contexts, spirituality, and economics (Bonanno, et al, 2005; Eberle, 2005; Rogoff, 2003; Stroebe *et al*, 1992; Yasien-Esmael & Shimshon Rubin, 2005). As the participants express how they have made meaning of their losses, I see these contextual factors at play. I have spoken already of the historical and political circumstances at the time of the deaths, and how they contributed to a particular group identity among Newfoundlanders at that time. Now let's look at how those influences have woven their ways into our participants' personal experiences of their losses.

Harvey sees the stoicism of Newfoundlanders at that time as a significant, and positive, aspect of his experience following the deaths of his family members:

That's where this bloodline comes in. That's why I'm convinced that; I'm thoroughly convinced of that. Because the only thing that I could think of was I drew strength from my parents. That's the only thing I can think of. I couldn't

begin to explain it in any other way. I've often had people say that to me, 'How'd you guys ever survive that?' I really believe that we have characteristics and personalities in our family that directly are descendant of our ancestors that've just continued on and on and on.

All those things that happened to us at that time, if we hadn't had the inner strength that we did I mean, I don't know. People in those situations today just can't handle it. We're creating a weak generation today. It's sad really.

We have an incredible strength in our family. Wherever it might be, distance has never diminished the strength that's in the family. I believe that that comes right from the core, right from the family core of generations. It's been so important to us all over the years.

Here Harvey is simultaneously attributing his inner strength to his genetic make-up and to the environment in which he was raised. This does not have to be seen as a contradiction. In fact, this very complexity is something with which those who study the evolution of culture continue to struggle. While there are multiple evolutionary models (including meme-based models and dual inheritance models¹⁴), the challenge among discussions of this type seems to be determining what the relationship is between agent and environment (Sterelny, 2006). The notion that a Newfoundland cultural identity is in some way both biological and societal was captured beautifully in a speech in 1974. It was at a celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Newfoundland's entrance into Canadian confederation when Robert "Nutbeam (an Englishman) announced, 'We are a very special race of people but in danger of losing this culture and so the first concept was that we would try and get our people to practice being what they naturally are, Newfoundlanders'" (Rompkey, 2006, p. 70). Obviously, the complexity of differentiating between hereditary and environmental influences is a long-lived struggle.

14 Meme-based models suggest that the evolution of cultures occurs at least in part by means of generations acquiring 'memes' (or cultural variants) from those before them (much like the biological inheritance of genes). Dual inheritance theory is similar, in that it models cultural inheritance and evolution on biological inheritance and evolution. However, it also considers the biological adaptability of the human agents of these cultural variants in their transmission among generations (Sterelny, 2006).

Cathy believes the context in which she was raised has had a great deal to do with the way she responded to her losses all those years ago, and continues to respond emotionally to other life events over time. Though for her, this was not so much a source of strength, as an obstacle. Here she demonstrates the lack of openness to acknowledging negative experiences highlighted by MacPhail (1992):

She [a cousin] said it just wasn't talked about. It wasn't talked about by her mother [Cathy's guardian in Halifax], and it was her only brother. But they just didn't talk about it. If you didn't talk about it, it would go away ... She didn't show any emotion anyway. She showed no emotion. So you kind of learn that, you know, you shouldn't show emotion. And, that's one thing I was afraid of when I started having children. How will I know how to show affection?

And after we got married, for a long time after we were married, whenever I used to get upset about something I could never talk about it. I would just be quiet about it, or leave the house and go for a walk. And, just not talk. And I guess it's because I was never used to it.

Roy also describes the time following his parents' deaths as one that required inner strength, with little outer expression of hardship or emotion of any kind:

See, there was never any talk about it. No one talked about it. No one talked about it to me ... I don't know, see, it was always... when we were younger, you just, it was the thing to do, not to talk about this.

That was one thing that we didn't say when we were younger. Like I would never say to Cathy – although there was a lot of love between us - I would never say to her, you know, that I love you. But I always do now.

I used to do a lot of thinking. Used to spend a lot of time by myself. I can remember, we lived on Alexander Street and lying in the snow. Just thinking, you know? And I used to think, now what would it be like to have parents? Because they were very good to me, but it was different. I used to ... not feel sorry for myself as much, but I used sometimes want Mom and Dad. It's different when you got a sister [as a guardian]. It's a little bit different. But Violet, see they were so good to me. I can't remember having any questions. But you know, everything was a blur.

It is evident that Roy was taking his cues from those around him as to how to respond to those tragic losses. All three of them did, although for each of them it meant

something slightly different. For Harvey, it was to be strong, self-reliant, and positive. For Cathy, it was to be quiet. And for Roy, it was to look inward. For all of them though, there was one major similarity, and that was not to dwell on circumstances. Although conditions were difficult, it was necessary to do what needed to be done in order to carry on: be a Newfoundlander.

This alternative perspective offers new ways of making meaning of the earlier discussion, in which development was the lens through which their responses to loss were understood. For instance, the lack of looking back or discussing painful experiences may help to explain why Roy's understanding of the series of events that took place did not change a great deal over time. Even though he is now an adult, he explained those events in great detail as he understood them as a child. Perhaps then developmental perspectives and cultural considerations can be considered together. Another example is Cathy's deeper understanding of the complexities around her sister's death in comparison to her parents' deaths. Her age is not the only thing that changed during the year in between those losses. By the time her sister died, she had previous experiences with grief from which her understanding would have grown. She also had a year of living in a new city with new norms and experiences to which she had to learn to adapt, which likely would have shifted her ways of relating with the world.

Now, I would like to talk about spirituality, to which I also alluded earlier. Religion and spirituality are acknowledged as "important factors that may influence children's conceptions of death" (Ayyash-Abdo, 2001, p. 419). Eberle (2005) has noted that much of the language used to articulate feelings surrounding grief is religious in

nature. In fact, both an American study (conducted by Eberle) and an Israeli study (conducted by Yasein-Esmael and Simshon Rubin in 2005) find that even when religious convictions are not strong, there seems to be some comfort in formulaically participating in spiritual or religious rituals. As is evident in the final – and I should add, most passionately sung – verse of the Ode to Newfoundland, Christian beliefs and practices are very much part of the Newfoundland context. This is perhaps not a surprise, due to the English and Irish ancestry of most Newfoundlanders (Gergory, 2004). In fact, this is evident in some of the place names mentioned in the interviews: Chapel Arm, St. John's, and Trinity Bay. This is clearly a part of our participants' contexts and experiences, then, so a few comments along this line are in order.

I will not go into detail in terms of understandings of death, since that was discussed so thoroughly already. All three of them, Roy, Harvey, and Cathy, had difficulty comprehending the finality of death. They all imagined their father would return at some point. This has been interpreted, previously, as a result of their ages at the time. However, another possible source of this confusion may actually be the Christian faith. Resurrection, we all know, is a significant aspect of Christian beliefs and traditions (Ayyash-Abdo, 2001).

Our participants spent their early years in an Anglican household in Stone's Cove, with the exception of their live-in grandmother, who was Catholic. Roy explains:

My mother was an Anglican, but her mother was a Catholic. Nanna was a Catholic. I remember [father's sister] Aunt Wendy saying she used to teach Mom the Roman Catholic prayers. The closest place [where there were other Catholics] was Marystown. Now that's where she was buried, you see. I became a Catholic a couple years after I was married. I've thought about that sometimes: I was always comfortable in a Catholic church. Very much so. Yeah, I was very comfortable,

very comfortable saying the Rosary and stuff like that, and I still do. I pray a lot. When I pray I start the prayer with the Rosary. But I say it to myself. I'm a strong believer that I was here before and I'll be here again after.

Harvey also recalls religion as being a significant part of his childhood:

I remember your mom [Cathy] and I going to Sunday school and Bible school when we were eleven and twelve years old. And I think I recognized even at that stage in life that there was power in prayer. There was power in someone greater than ourselves. I mean I drew incredible strength from that, although I wasn't really sure I understood it.

As Harvey says, involvement in church was also a part of Cathy's childhood. But for her, in some ways she felt some discomfort as she tried to make sense of her experiences through Christianity:

In the Anglican Church, which is what I grew up in, there's a creed. At the end of it, it says, 'I believe in life everlasting and the resurrection of the dead.' When I was in Grand Falls [Newfoundland] teaching I used to go to a Bible study group. It was for young people, and there was a student minister leading the Bible study. And we were talking about these things one night. And I said, 'Supposing you don't believe in life everlasting?' And he said, 'Well, you just accept it.' And that was not an acceptable answer for me. And so anytime I'm in an Anglican church and they say that creed, I don't say that part. I haven't for years and years and years because I don't believe it. I don't believe there's life everlasting.

Cathy further explains that in her view, life everlasting is only possible in the memories of those still living. Since she has very few memories of her deceased parents, their deaths feel even more final than they might be otherwise. Even though it has impacted them in different ways, the religious contexts of their childhoods have clearly played a role in how all three of them have interpreted their losses. Roy has found solace in prayer and belief in reincarnation, as he explained to me in great detail. Harvey finds strength in believing he is part of something larger than himself. Cathy has had some struggles when attempting to make meaning of her religious experiences as they relate to

her losses. However, as described in detail earlier in this discussion, they all see value in some religious rituals, such as funerals and ceremonies, in bringing a sense of closure to their losses. And yes, there is evidence of spirituality even in the language with which they talk about their grief. Harvey, in particular, uses vocabulary that is quite religious in nature:

I think it was kind of a cleansing thing that really felt good for me.

I talked to Aunt Elsie [guardian following parents' deaths] about it before she died. I told her just how important this was to me to be able to finally have some sense of - I want to use the word relief, that's not true... um, sense of cleansing about this whole thing. And maybe that's the wrong word too, but that's the way I feel. It's kind of neat really.

How I ever became successful at what I did being cluttered up the way I was, is nothing but the grace of God.

I'm really looking forward to [the Mariner's memorial ceremony¹⁵] this summer. I just think it's going to be a healing process for some of the people who really need to have a healing process.

Finally, as mentioned, the economic conditions in Newfoundland at that time also had very real effects on the lived experiences of Cathy, Harvey, and Roy leading up to and during the time of their losses. The hard work ethic, large families, lack of medical interventions, and the isolation of communities were all likely results of these conditions. Living in a multi-generational household in Stone's Cove with their maternal grandmother and their paternal grandfather is another such example, which provided them with their first exposure to death at a very young age. For both Cathy and Roy, the death of their grandmother in their family home was a significant incident. Cathy describes it as follows:

¹⁵ In August, 2007 (six months after research interviews), a Mariner's Memorial will be erected in Grand Bank, Newfoundland in honour of the many men who have been lost at sea over the years, and the families that remain. On it will be a plaque with the name of the participants' father. Participants and much of their extended family will be present for the unveiling of the monument, which will be the first ceremony and the first monument in memory of their father, who was lost at sea in November of 1955.

When I was nine years old, my grandmother died. And that was the first person in our family to have died since I was born, that I could remember. And it had a really bad effect on me. Well, she was living with us. And, I guess I shared a bedroom with her. She was dying at home; we were living in a very small community, so there was no hospital or anything like that. And all that day she was calling out to herself. I was sitting on the steps with somebody else, and I would not go in the house. And I went to somebody else's house that night. And for the longest time after that I would not go upstairs alone in our house, where she had died. I don't remember the funeral or anything like that but I do remember her dying.

Even though Roy was a very little boy, his memory of this event is quite vivid:

I don't know how old I was, probably about maybe five. But I can remember my grandmother dying. I can remember, I was lying in bed. Where she was, I don't know, maybe downstairs. Anyway, you'd hear her breathing like this: [*breathing*], 'Oh, she's going to be all right, she's going to be all right' [*mimicking the adult voices around her*]. Dad was there and Mom was there, and I don't know who else was there. Everyone was around, I think. And you'd hear her breathing like so [*breathing*], 'Oh, she's going to be all right, she's going to be all right.' And then you'd hear this, [*exhaling loudly*], 'She's gone. She's gone. She's gone, yeah, she's gone. That's all right, she's happy now. She's in a new place now. She's gone.' And then, all of a sudden, [*breathing in*], 'Nope, yeah, she's going to be all right, she's going to be all right, she's going to be all right.' And this kept going on it seemed like, for hours, and I fell asleep. And the next morning she was dead. I can remember hearing her breathe.

It is believed that previous experiences with death impacts how a loss will be experienced (Eberle, 2005; Rogoff, 2003). Let's return to Roy's difficulty in believing that his father was dead and never coming back. Then consider the fact that his father's ship was lost only two years after he overheard the above conversation during his grandmother's final hours. Would it not then be likely that one may have had some bearing on the other? It seems that not only age, but context, has been quite a significant contributor in how our participants have come to interpret and understand their losses.

I will draw one more example from their stories. When economic conditions are not favourable, luxuries are also hard to come by. One such luxury these families did

without was a lot of pictures, as film and developing were costly. This may on the surface sound less than significant, but - particularly in Cathy's case - it seems to have had a very real impact on how she has been able to make meaning of her losses. The fact that they have very few photographs of their families and homes (Eberle, 2005), coupled with the fact that it was not socially acceptable to discuss their losses, made holding onto memories of their deceased loved ones very difficult. And memories are, for many people, a source of comfort following bereavement (Moules, in Doane & Varcoe, 2005). Therefore, having neither conversations about nor many photographs of their deceased loved ones are very significant contextual considerations. For is it not largely through conversation and photographs that memories are sustained? It seems to be so for Cathy, Roy, and Harvey. In fact, Roy says exactly that: "And a lot of the memories of that are brought back with pictures."

For Cathy, who can remember very, very little of her childhood, and who spent much of her childhood separated from her siblings (and their stories and memories), photographs hold a great deal of significance:

The thing I've always wanted was a family picture [with husband and three daughters]. I guess because I have no pictures of us [parents and siblings all together]. There's a picture of my mother with Roy. There's a picture of my father with [brother] Fred. But, there's no pictures of all our family unit. I don't have a picture of my mother and father together, for example. In those days pictures weren't taken very often. And there's no way we would've gotten a picture of all of us because the older ones moved away from home before younger ones were born.

And maybe, if as a family, if we'd been together more since, and the ones who have the memories talked about what life was like or you know, just things, maybe it would help.

Therefore it is evident that the experiences they had, the meanings they made, and the ways they grieved – largely alone – have much to do with contextual factors that are not necessarily taken into consideration within the previous explanation. I would like to emphasize the fact that I do not believe age-based notions of development and grief should be discarded. I do think they should be considered both within context, and as emergent from particular contexts (Wainryb, 2004). I would also suggest, based on the evidence provided by my participants, that we look at contexts as integral aspects of any grieving process, rather than “external factors” (Murray, 2001, p. 229). Acknowledging the time and places in which Harvey, Roy, and Cathy experienced their losses helps us to understand to a greater degree how they respond to and understand their losses, and why.

*

It is getting dark now. Exhausted, I get up to turn on another light. Standing motionless for a while, I reflect on my reaction after the first explanation, and I feel a little pang of – what is that? Guilt? Almost. I realize I had wrongly assumed their stories would fit into a neat package. And what’s worse, I was briefly comfortable with that.

Oh, how grateful I am to have taken the time to consider this richer, contextual perspective. It somehow seems so much more whole. Pleased, I pour myself a glass of wine.

No. Really? It’s there again: the sense that I have not reached the end. I can feel the tension inside me building, similarly to the way it did before. And this time, just a little, I feel my own heels dig in. This is not what I signed up for.

I turn on some music. The tension is still there.

I turn up the volume, just a little. It makes no difference; that voice is going to make itself heard. I take a seat. Exhale.

“You need to take it another step. You need to consider a couple more things. First, the worlds of these participants did not stop shifting in 1956. The three of them have continued to live in dynamic contexts in the many years that followed. The meanings they’ve made of those losses continue to shift as well.”

Can’t disagree with that.

“And secondly, the influence in the relationship between a person and his or her context is not uni-directional. These people were not passive recipients of what happened around them. If so, they – and the rest of their family – would have had identical experiences. No, in the stories I heard them tell, they were active agents, making meaning of their losses in their own unique ways. I would argue, in fact, that they contributed to their changing contexts, shifting and shaping them even as they moved through them. We need to explore that further.”

Uncomfortable as it makes me, I know I must open myself up to this. If I want a richer understanding, and I do, then I can’t stop this conversation; I can’t drown it out. I need to let go of the idea that there is a final conclusion to this dialogue, and appreciate it for the process that it is.

I turn off the music and return to my desk.

I attempt to interpret their stories of grief and loss as social constructions ...

*

The Lens of Social Constructionism

As has been demonstrated with multiple examples already, there is no denying the contexts in which the participants were living at the time of their losses had some bearing on how the losses were interpreted. However, if I'm not mistaken, it has also been demonstrated that how this occurs for each participant is different. To be honest, I can hear a great deal of variation among the stories they have shared. As stated by Hoskins (2003), "cultural groups are complex ... Although there are commonalities within a cultural group, each individual makes meaning of those aspects of culture through highly individualized processes" (p. 321). In addition, of course, it must be noted that the contextual conditions outlined previously were not entirely unique to Newfoundland in that time and place. The social conditions that have been highlighted may actually describe, to some extent, many places at various points in history (Eberle, 2005).

We cannot pretend the variations in their stories do not exist. We must explore further, and ask ourselves how these are made possible. As I said, it was clear within their accounts that there are not only variations among cultures, but there are variations among individuals within a cultural group (which in itself is nearly impossible to define precisely). Furthermore, not only are there variations among individuals, but there are actually variations *within* individual experiences. The three of our participants demonstrate that over time, as conditions and circumstances have changed, so have their experiences of their losses. But wait, there's more: I hear in their stories evidence that they themselves have contributed to those changing circumstances. Harvey, Roy, and

Cathy engage actively in many ways towards the construction of their social conditions, or at the very least, of their experiences of them.

This notion of individuals “co-constructing” their realities is not an entirely new idea (Peavy, 2004, p. 85). It is an increasingly supported concept, and seems in many ways to provide not only explanations, but possibilities as to how individuals can be intentionally engaged with their contexts. These possibilities, in turn, can help people find more voice and more agency in their own lives (Mahoney, 2003; Neimeyer, 2005; Peavy, 2004).

Social constructionists emphasize the significance of the meaning a person makes when aiming to understand an experience. In other words, how an event is interpreted (“the narrative truth”) may have more bearing on an experience than the “factual truth” of the event (Gergen, 1999, p. 72). For instance, Harvey remembers visiting his mother alone in the hospital. Cathy feels they all went in together. Roy does not believe he saw his mother in the hospital at all. ‘Accuracy’ of recollections, from a social constructionist perspective, is not necessarily relevant. Meaning of events, on the other hand, is incredibly relevant. What kind of significance this event holds for each of them individually, rather than who is ‘right’ would be of interest to a social constructionist. Some would argue (myself included) that to draw a distinction between narrative and factual history as though they are exclusive to one another misses the mark. Reid (2005) believes it is inaccurate to assume an event can be discussed as factual history at all. He says, “to exclude experience and mental processing from the domain of ‘what actually occurred’ would be to deny the existence of mental events” (p. 673).

A social constructionist perspective is a way of seeing people in the world as active agents in the realities *they* experience (Peavy, 2004). It is important to note, as well, that this perspective is not one that emphasizes individual experiences instead of contextual or cultural ones. Rather, the two are seen as mutually constructive. Social constructionists, when exploring how meaning is made of an event, see meaning emerging when an individual is in relationship with his or her environment. Family, society, gender, language, media, history: all of these do not impose meaning on people. It is when and how people engage with these contextual elements – and limitless others, of course – that meanings are felt in an experience (Gergen, 1999; Mahoney, 2003; Peavy, 2004). In other words, the significance of the events in our lives comes from the meaning we give them, meanings which are based on available cultural and linguistic resources and are rooted in particular communities and traditions. And the meaning we give an event emerges as we relate with it. So, we might say, life happens in relationship (Fewster, 1990). Hoskins (2003) reminds us that rather than simplifying matters, this relational perspective illuminates “the overwhelming task of being able to attribute any influence to one particular source” (p. 322). In Reid’s analysis of the function of memory (2005), a similar point is made: “Memories are phenomena that are too complex to be captured by one theory, concept, or metaphor ... The same acknowledgement, then, should be given to experience – the soil in which memory grows” (p. 685).

To complicate matters further, we must remember that identities, meanings, and perceptions are not static (Hoskins, 2003). Our experiences may shift over time, or even be re-experienced throughout our lifetimes as circumstances and perspectives change

(Berikoff, 2006; Reid, 2005). As we continuously engage in new ways with changing contexts, so too do we adapt the meanings we make of certain experiences. The complexity increases then when we consider that as we change within a context, that context also changes, as it is composed in part by ourselves (Gergen, 1999).

This last dimension is an intriguing aspect of constructionist thinking – for it means we are, after all, not simply along for the ride. If “it is through dialogue that we come to know and understand ourselves” (Hoskins, 2003, p. 322), then we each have the capacity to contribute to the construction of our experiences of the world, simply in how we engage with it and within it (Peavy, 2004). Dialogue in this instance refers to a process that is sometimes literal and sometimes figurative, but always relational (Hoskins, 2003).

Harvey, in one of his interviews, touches on exactly this point when speaking of the three interview participants, by saying: “And everybody’s recollections are going to be different and yet they’re the same. The circumstances are the same but the recollections’ll be different.” Interestingly, in an article addressing Newfoundland’s identity construction as a province, Conrad (2002) highlights the remarkable potential that lies in such an observation: “The notion that there are many histories of the same past enables us to transcend what economists are fond of calling ‘path dependency’, ... [meaning] what we are today is a result of what happened in the past” (p. 160).

Again, this does not mean past events have no bearing on how we find meaning in our worlds. It means they do not direct how we make meaning; they simply contribute to the dialogue. There are many other contributors to that dialogue, including other

contextual elements and, of course, ourselves. This idea, that meaning-making is a multi-directional, relational process is articulated by Kenneth Gergen (1998) as a “relational matrix”. Seeing the process as a matrix, rather than a linear path enables us to recognize to a greater degree the complexities of the processes taking place.

How, then, might someone who holds such a perspective approach the experience of grief? Stroebe et al. (1992) address the value of social constructionist thinking when it comes to understanding responses to bereavement. They remind us that how one responds to the death of a loved one is at least partially “socially constituted” (p. 1205) and that regarding grief reactions too generally may unnecessarily lead to questions of “normalcy or emotional adequacy” of some people’s responses (p. 1209). This, in turn, may contribute to the pathologization of “an otherwise unproblematic segment of the population” (p. 1209).

Social constructionists believe that when we remember an event, we do not identically replicate our experiences in our minds, but usually recall things differently than they were first experienced. This is inevitable, as our worlds and understandings will have changed since the past event (Mahoney, 2003). Reid’s research (2005) suggests this is not simply an interesting observation, but serves a valuable function. While he does not directly address loss in his studies, he does speak of it as one example of the difficult circumstances he explores. In studying how people remember such “life-changing events” (p. 698) he observes that memory may actually lead people to re-experience a loss, often differently than the initial experience. All three of the participants interviewed for the current study feel now that the events of their childhoods

were more traumatic than they realized at the time. Rather than viewing this as problematic, Reid believes “a potential advantage of ... [the] ability to bring aspects of the experience to awareness after the critical event has passed [is] *that adaptive behaviors remain possible*” (p. 690; my emphasis).

This idea is supported by practitioners who frequently come in contact with families who are grieving. Nancy Moules (in Doane & Varcoe, 2005) states that “those who have lost a loved one continue to experience aspects of grief throughout their lifetime, though these aspects do change over time and they become comforting and connecting rather than only painful” (p. 356). With this, she captures the social constructionist assumption that while our circumstances do inform the meaning we make of our experiences, our relationship with those circumstances determines how that meaning comes to be made (Mahoney, 2003). In addition, meanings change over time, and those changes can serve positive functions (Reid, 2005). In fact, by engaging intentionally with our contexts and experiences we can have more control over how an experience is felt (Peavy, 2004). Moules suggests that the “art of grieving requires the use of different muscles than we are used to using in our lives” (p.358), thus implying we can actually learn to actively experience loss in different ways: opening the door to what Reid calls “adaptive behaviours” (p. 690) that might lessen the pain of the experience.

Why then, from such a perspective, would Harvey, Roy, and Cathy not have ‘adapted’ to their losses in the same ways over the past 51 years? It is believed by many social constructionists that “narrative structure informs and contains our lives” (Gergen, 1999, p. 70). In order to make sense of the people we meet and how they and their lives

'fit' within the world that we know, we tend to formulate narratives around them: their stories. Over time, we come to see our own lives as a series of events that follow one from another, with a beginning, middle, and an assumed or expected endpoint. In some sense, this narrative structure imposes certain socially determined limits over how we come to understand our own lives. In another sense, though, our stories are only partially socially informed, and partially up to us. In this respect, we do have some creative freedom when it comes to how we wish to formulate our stories (Bruner, 2004; Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). In fact, therapy or counselling work is often simply a matter of learning to tell one's life narrative in a way that allows for more desirable possibilities for ourselves (Gergen, 1999; Mahoney, 2003; Peavy, 2004). As put forth by Gubrium and Holstein (1998), "as social research increasingly points to the narrative quality of lives, the personal story is being resuscitated as an important source of experiential data" (p. 163).

It is this perspective, I believe, that helps us to understand the differences that exist among Harvey, Roy, and Cathy's stories. Even though they are members of the same family and endured the same losses within the same time and place in history, their experiences are in no way identical. Gubrium and Holstein (1998) remind us that "cultural resources do not determine how they are used, but instead, provide material for the narrator to construct his or her own story as distinguishable from others who may be similarly placed in life" (p. 167). Thus our participants have constructed their narratives in entirely different ways, rendering quite unique interpretations of their shared experiences. I would like to look at each of them separately, so we can better understand

their various ways of making meaning of their childhood losses. I will begin with Harvey.

When discussing life narratives, Gergen (1999) differentiates between two rudimentary forms of narrative: progressive and regressive. In both, there is a desired endpoint, or goal. In the case of progressive narratives, life events are seen to lead towards the goal. In regressive narratives, life events move the person farther from the desired outcome. As Harvey shares his story, there is no mistaking he sees his life as a progressive narrative:

I've got it pretty easy. And if you look at where you come from to where you're going, and realize how much more difficult other people had it to get there, you realize how easy this is. So to me ... it was a challenge, and I had a lot of other obstacles going on along the way, but this was fun. And the end result was – I'm still having fun. I mean I'm 61 years old and I haven't stopped having fun.

Despite all of his hardships, Harvey believes his life has taken him along a positive path: one that has led – and continues to lead – him in a desired direction. Gergen (1999) further distinguishes narratives beyond the categories of progressive and regressive. He suggests that when a person tells his or her story as “a series of ups and downs” in which he or she struggles, experiences set-backs, and eventually wins, the story resembles a progressive narrative that is known as the “heroic saga narrative” (p. 71). Harvey's story fits this description. Consider the following examples:

It was a constant battle ... So that's why I'm really proud of where I've come from to where I am because I know how hard it was. It wasn't a situation where I went from here to here. You know, I went from here to here to here to here to here to here. Do you know what I mean? And it was really difficult at times, and I used to have to constantly remind myself of my focus.

I think the more trials and tribulations you go through, the better your understanding of life is.

Harvey sees his life as one full of struggle, but worthwhile struggle, because it has brought him to what he now feels is a desirable place. (Interestingly, this is consistent with the notion that his experiences of loss have been impacted by Christian ideologies, as addressed earlier). Again, if we are interested in understanding how he experiences his losses, it is the meaning he has given the events of his life and the lens through which he views them that are significant. Perhaps if, equipped with this understanding of the overall theme of Harvey's narrative, we return to his story and how he has chosen to share it, we can now better understand how he has come to interpret his childhood losses. In addition, we may catch glimpses of experiences that contributed to his construction of his life story in this way. From even his earliest memories, Harvey presents the events in his life as opportunities to make something good from a bad situation:

But Dad was away a lot, too. We didn't see him a lot, so we kind of cherished the time we had when he was there.

I can remember leaving there [Grand Bank] and coming to Halifax on the train, and on the boat and all that kind of stuff. And, that was a bit of an adventure...And I can remember trying not to dwell on it ... so, the burden of the thing was eased a little bit by all those new adventures.

Even as he describes hardships, he casts them in a light that emphasizes the possibilities, rather than the limitations of his circumstances. There are times, however, when he is unable to do that:

Until the day that they actually gave up hope, gave up looking [for the lost ship], until that day, as far as I was concerned he [father] was just lost and they were gonna find him ... I can remember lying on the stairs going up to the bedroom and just lying there and crying. I can remember that.

I remember when [sister] Betty died, but I guess I was so hardened to it by then that it didn't hit me as hard as it would've if I hadn't been. Oh, it's true. I had put a shell around myself, I said, 'This ain't gonna hurt me no more. I've had enough hurt.' Right? So I was a bit callused. I've often felt bad about that. But I

remember feeling that way. And then when Aunt Nora died ... I thought, 'God love her. She's a nice person', but, you know, I had enough hurts to deal with.

[Cathy] never, ever knew that, but that's why I went to Corner Brook. Oh yeah, I missed her something awful. When she left Aunt Fern's [in Halifax] to go down to visit Violet [in Newfoundland, never returning to Halifax], that was awful. That was awful. Oh. That was terrible. Yeah, that was hard to deal with.

In such cases, he eventually finds ways of reframing events over time, by seeing them as part of the larger picture, the meta-narrative of his life, which ultimately brings him to a positive place. He thus identifies his most difficult experiences as necessary factors that have contributed positively to where he finds himself now:

And I think the reason I value family so much is because I lost so much family at a young age.

I think that all the experiences that I had in my early life, all of that drama and all that traumatic stuff I went through, losing my mom and dad: I believe all that made me stronger. I realized that if I was going to survive I had to get tough with myself.

How has he come to such an attitude? What enables Harvey to reinterpret all of his hardships in such a pragmatic way? How has he determined that he even has the capacity to direct his life as such despite all of his hardships? The way he tells his story, it seems that as he found himself with fewer and fewer people to rely on (due largely to death and separation: his multiple losses), he practiced looking inward for solutions and actually experienced some small successes with that. Over time, he recognized that he could most readily taste success when he looked inward for strength, so he intentionally began to put energy into developing that skill in himself. This is an example of the social constructivist idea of co-creating one's reality (Peavy, 2004). For Harvey, it began when he was a young boy, living with his aunt and uncle in Halifax:

When I'd go to bed at night, I would relive the [morning's hockey] game until I'd fall asleep. I still do that. My golf game, I still do that. And I think I've trained

myself to do that to get rid of the pressures of the day or whatever. But back then, it was to get rid of the thought pattern that I went through. I used to relive the hockey game thing in my mind 'cause that was all I was thinking about 'til I'd fall asleep, to get rid of that.

I think I programmed myself that way. I think I didn't just get up one morning and, and decide that that's my attitude about life and that's the way that I was going to be. I think I'm very much a positive person. I like to think I am. I've always thrived on a positive mental attitude. I think a lot of it came from reading books ... I got into that at an early, early, a real early age. I looked at that and I said, 'You know what? That's what it's all about. It's all about thought pattern. It's all mind over matter.'

What bearing does this narrative have on how he now interprets and experiences his losses? He tells the story of his grief in much the same way as he tells the story of his life. There was pain and there were struggles, but for Harvey these were necessary steps along the way to a positive relationship with the memories of his deceased family members:

It's not that I think of them any less, it's just that it's more of pleasant thing now. I don't want to forget, right? It's just letting go of some of the baggage that I carried with it, because I don't believe it's necessary.

Those are the things now that I can remember and have fun with those things. I can relate to them in a real good way. And that's what I'm saying. This is why this is refreshing for me because I couldn't deal with that stuff before the way that I deal with it today. You know, maybe before all I'd remember was having my finger cut open. Now I can remember having my finger bandaged up after it was cut open. Do you know what I mean? It's different now. My thoughts are different. My memories are different. I'm a more open, I'm more open about it.

And again, I think we all have that strength of character within us to be able to turn that loose. But it needs to be dug up, it needs to be talked about, it needs to be opened up. It really does, I mean this is not something that's sad. This is something that can become a very good part of the experience. You know, 'cause you should be able to enjoy your memories. Not bury them.

Within Harvey's heroic saga narrative of grief and loss, we see evidence of the power of perception and interpretation in how grief is actually experienced: the translation of narrative truths into factual truths (Gergen, 1999). Moules (in Doane &

Varcoe, 2005) believes that for most people, “death does not mean the end of a relationship, but a change in the relationship, with new depths and possibilities” (p. 357). Harvey has found for himself a way to access those possibilities, rather than being bound by the experiences he endured fifty years ago. While those experiences are part of what led him to his current conception of his losses, it is how he has engaged with them that has ultimately enabled him to head in that direction. Harvey’s relationship with his context has given him a sense of agency in his own life. He has made choices about how he wishes to remember, and in turn his memory has opened in ways that enable him to access those positive thoughts. In fact, we can even see in the way that he edits his story (for instance, by saying, “And I hesitate to even go this route”), that he is not only authoring his story, but monitoring and modifying the story even as it is being told (Gubrium and Holstein, 1998). Clearly, then, he is making active choices as to which parts of his story he wishes to highlight and which he wishes to diminish. He has constructed a narrative for himself that enables him to effectively move about in the world and live more comfortably with the losses of his childhood. Thus, interpretation and experience become one and the same.

For Roy, who is three years younger than his brother Harvey, the narrative has taken a slightly different form. While his story can still be characterized as a progressive narrative (Gergen, 1999), Roy does not necessarily identify himself as the primary agent of change in his own life. Roy’s story might more likely be characterized as a “happily-ever-after narrative” because despite many difficulties, he has a life with which he is pleased (p. 71). Still, by hearing his story and noting not only its content, but its form as

well, we can understand perhaps a little more clearly how he has come to interpret his losses over his lifetime (Gubrium and Holstein, 1998). We can witness how he has engaged with his context in various ways, in order to make meaning of his experiences.

While Harvey sees it as necessary to work hard to overcome his hardships, including his losses, Roy seems to experience life's difficulties as simply a matter of course. Life is not easy, and at times it has been hard, but overall, he feels he is "blessed". All things considered, Roy felt – and feels – lucky. This is a recurring theme throughout both of his interviews. He says, "I always thought I was lucky; I was the lucky one. I always thought I had the best of anyone. And even now..."

His very early memories of his life in Stone's Cove – before the deaths – are full of warm images of childhood:

The first real memory of my father was once he took me up to a place next harbour to Stone's Cove ... he used to keep the schooner up there in the winter. And he took me up one Saturday, I think it was. I can remember trying to put my arms around the mast and I couldn't get them around it. It was so huge.

I can remember sleeping with my mother. And that was a very nice feeling. You know, sleeping with Mom.

And I slept with my grandfather. I can remember I slept in his bed, because it was a feather bed and you'd get in and you'd just sink right down.

Having constructed his reality in such a light, how then does Roy view the painful events of his life? How does he recall those difficult times of loss and the years that followed? It seems that, unlike Harvey, it is the warmth and love, not the overcoming of obstacles, to which Roy attributes his "fortunate" position:

While I was with Betty [sister in Halifax], I do believe, the news came that Mom died. And it must've been broken to me very gently. I don't know who told me, but I can remember that I didn't cry. I didn't cry. And I don't know why I didn't cry, but I didn't cry. Maybe it was the way it was brought on to me, or maybe it was the way it was presented to me, I should say ... I didn't know [Mom] was

going to die ... I don't know what they told me but, I didn't have, I can't remember having any questions.

Anyway, I still consider myself being the lucky one. Fortunate.

[Sister] Violet came up to Halifax, the month March seems to ring a bell, to get me. She came initially to get one of us, Harvey or myself, and for whatever reason she chose me. I'm glad she did ... she was so kind.

What enables him to foster such recollections of his seemingly tragic past?

According to Roy, it simply makes sense for him to remember the positive aspects of his life rather than the hardships. Much like Reid's analysis of memory (2005) discussed earlier, Roy believes it would not have been helpful for him to have experienced things in any other way:

I don't know. It's like a big buffet, and you pick the food that you like. I mean why should you pick up olives if you don't like olives? So forget them! And so you go to a buffet and there's some sour pickles there, so you don't pick them up. And why should you? But I'm sure some people would pick them up and say, 'Christ, how could you eat that?' Well, if you don't like it, don't touch it, you know. So you don't remember.

Maybe I blotted that, the negative feelings out. And didn't choose to remember that ... I think I blank out the things that are not pleasant.

How has this perspective informed his interpretations and experiences of the deaths of his family members? How has it impacted the ways he continues "to stay in relationship with, and connected to, the [people] who [have] died" (Moules, in Doane & Varcoe, 2005, p. 357)? Listening to Roy tell his stories, I hear him find new and creative ways, over time, to re-create that warmth: the loving feeling that helped him through his difficult times. In his earliest years, it came to him from his parents, and later it came from his sister, Violet. Eventually, however, he seems to have found ways to create it within and for himself. This has enabled him to continue his relationships with the deceased and to positively re-experience some difficult life events.

Thirty years after his losses, Roy painted a picture of his mother's face. This is how he describes the experience: "That was like someone was guiding my hand. I painted the picture in two hours. From start to finish, two hours. And it was really weird. Effortless. The paint was just gliding on. I don't know. It was so comforting when I was doing it."

Here are several other examples of ways Roy has accessed that comfortable feeling from within himself:

Do you scuba dive? I go down under, and it's like I'm in another world. I don't think – like you can leave all your thoughts – all your thoughts are up there. And you come down, like you're in another zone. Very, very, very comfortable.

You know when I pray a lot? When I'm in the sauna. I go to the sauna just about every day, and usually there's no one there. So it's quiet. And you just lie on your back and, lift yourself.

When I pray for someone, I either get a good feeling, or not so good, you know? ... I don't know how to explain it. Not a physical feeling, but a warm feeling. Like a feeling when you see a friend, there's a lot of love in between you: a warm feeling towards someone.

The only closure for Mom is when I go to the cemetery. Oh, I talk to her. I talk to her. And, when I used to smoke, sometimes I'd go down after supper and I'd sit down on the grave across from her. And I'd have a smoke and I'd read her headstone over and over and over, and be talking to her. Tried to imagine her lying there, and think about how she was kind to me.

... pleasant memories. And therefore I have two paintings of Chapel Arm [hanging in his home].

And when I look at the [painted] picture of Mom, I see the love in her face and it looks like she's looking at me.

And there's a picture here of me on the tolt [hill] that Cathy took that day. But I took a picture with a digital camera of the picture. So, it's a black and white picture, it's on there [the computer]. It comes up every now and then. It's on the screensaver.

And the model of the [schooner] Mabel Dorothy well, I pass that every day. It's just, you know. It's a nice feeling. It's all good feelings.

Over time Roy has recreated the warmth that sustained him over the years in many personal ways, thus turning his painful past experiences into positive, current

experiences (Moules, in Doane & Varcoe, 2005; Peavy, 2004). Interestingly, in doing this, he has come to see potential for this to transfer into something not only intrapersonal, but interpersonal. As he engages with his context, that context itself is changed (Gergen, 1999). As a result of these self-constructed opportunities for a sense of warmth and love, Roy's world is now slightly altered, and he feels the positive effects such initiatives have had on his life. Due to these shifts, he is beginning to find new ways of engaging with the world and people in it. Even now, over fifty years later, Roy continues to initiate new ways to re-experience his past differently:

Yesterday when I was talking to [brother's wife] Sheila and I said how wonderful it would be if the brothers and sisters, if any brothers and sisters could go on a retreat and just talk about their experiences, their memories of past times, and how each person in the family has impacted their memories. Like, for instance, how wonderful would it be if a brother or sister said, 'Do you know when you gave me this it meant so much to me?' And to me, it might have been insignificant.

These are the kinds of things that we need to talk [about] as a family, you know. Because it's nice.

I'll send an invitation [for a retreat this summer].

For both Harvey and Roy, it is not only the events or contexts in which they occurred that have impacted how they experience their losses. Additionally, perhaps even ultimately, it is the ways they relate with those events and contexts that most inform how they are experienced and interpreted. Because of that, no experience is ever complete, and their pasts continue to inform their presents, just as their presents allow them to reshape and reinterpret their pasts (Berikoff, 2006).

In Cathy's case, the narrative she tells travels in two directions. As I hear her story, and consider the flow of events, I notice that at some point, it shifts. What starts as a regressive narrative seems to change directions, and she begins telling a progressive tale

(Gergen, 1999). Interestingly, she has even identified two separate starting points. Let's begin with the first: the regressive narrative, which Gergen (1999) identifies as a story in which "the endpoint is negative ... and the story tells about continuous decline" (p. 70). How does Cathy recall her earlier life events as such?

In her regressive narrative, the overarching theme seems to be that she never had the opportunity to develop the tools required for her to reconcile her losses, and now is not in a position to ever reach that goal. How does she present this as unfolding? She begins this particular story with the death of her grandmother and says, "When I was nine years old, my grandmother died. And that was the first person in our family to have died since I was born, that I could remember. And it had a really bad effect on me ... That was the beginning really. I guess that was in 1953."

From there the story goes to more and more deaths and losses, all of which she endures alone. At times there is hope and life is good. But then, she is once again defeated. Just when it seems things are looking up, her story brings her through more and more pain:

We moved to Grand Bank [in 1955] and my father got lost and my mother got sick and we were taken from there.

Well, the rest of us went to Halifax with these relatives. I felt lucky when I got there and realized I was next door to [sister] Betty. [Baby brother] Warren was two months, and Roy was seven and a half, or seven. And Betty took the three of them [including two-year-old Junior]. And so for a few months things were good, you know, I was surrounded by family. But things were very - I mean we went there in November which is a bleak time of the year.

But I made friends and one girl that I was really close to, her name was Anna, and they lived just over the street from us ... There was another friend, Denise, who lived over the street from the school, and I used to take my lunch and I would go to her house for lunch ... So those two friendships, I have good memories of them.

It wasn't a happy household that I lived in, in Halifax. It just wasn't ... I remember being always on edge. I was always afraid I was going to do something wrong.

Sometimes I think my sister's death created more losses than my parents'.

I don't know. You can't get back. We can never be – we did not grow up as a family.

It seemed like we were just coasting through and accepting everything as it came and OK, so we live in Halifax now, and I live in Chapel Arm now. You know, just take things as they come, and don't ask why.

Unlike Harvey, Cathy does not feel that she was in the driver's seat during those earlier experiences. She uses passive language ("we were taken from there") and presents herself as a passenger being tossed among a series of unfortunate circumstances. Unlike Roy, she cannot recall a sense of love and warmth that nurtured her through those difficult times. As was mentioned much earlier in the discussion about cultural influences, nobody openly discussed these losses or their effects with Cathy and her siblings. For Cathy, this is a major part of the story, as she feels she was not equipped to experience these relationships in new and positive ways, and the pain persists: "When [oldest sister] Violet wrote this article about the [schooner] Mabel Dorothy¹⁶, she said in it she was pleased. After all we'd gone through, we all did well, or made out all right. Yeah, we all did well, but inside [*pointing to her chest*], we haven't."

What are the implications of this story on the meaning she has made of these relationships, these losses and experiences, over time? How does she interpret these instances of silently experiencing loss after loss, losing her grasp of the few memories she once held?

¹⁶ In recent years, Violet and Violet's husband have begun writing. Her husband has published two books about his life in rural Newfoundland. Violet has written and published several articles about stories of her past in a St. John's newspaper, The Evening Telegram. All of these publications include many details about the lives of Roy, Harvey, and Cathy.

But, I don't know anything I can do about it. There's nothing I can do about it.

To me, I mean death is final. That's it. There is no – you can, you can ... and I guess, I was going to say, 'you can have memories'. And I guess that's the problem: I don't have the memories [*tears*]. That's what would make it easier.

Sometimes I get in a mood. Sometimes I feel low. I don't know why it happens. I can't explain that [*tears*]. There's a loss ...

But I do have problems. And the other thing that I have problems with: I feel uncomfortable when I'm with a group of women and they're talking about things they did with their mother or things they learned from their mother. You know? And, like when we started having children, I wanted to be the best mother in the world. But I didn't know how.

As presented in this regressive narrative, Cathy feels that her earlier experiences prevented her from learning what she needed in order to live the life she wants for herself. She wants to be a good teacher, a good mother, a good wife, and a good friend. But she finds herself constantly questioning whether or not she has the tools. And she relates these uncertainties back to those earlier losses and how they have simply not been addressed. What's more, she feels that she's lost an opportunity for a continued relationship with her deceased parents. Because of these earlier conditions having brought her to a state in which she has very few memories, she cannot retrieve them as hard as she tries. Speaking of a biography she wrote about her father in preparation for the upcoming Mariner's Memorial, she says, "Yeah, I did that hoping something would spark my memory, but it didn't."

So, what of the progressive narrative I mentioned? Oh, it exists, and it was exciting to hear her tell it. Although she tells it tentatively, as perhaps she hasn't been identifying with this story for as long as the previous one, it is there. I see evidence of hope, peace and even agency in Cathy as it comes to the foreground, and the regressive

tale slowly takes backstage; the passive verbs magically diminish. The progressive narrative begins not in Cathy's childhood, but in her adult life. She starts it like this:

[Brother] Warren's play really started all of this. Yeah, actually my going to visit Warren started all this when [daughter] Terri went to university. I went to visit Warren in Hamilton and spent some time with him and we got to know each other and he wrote a story. And that was the beginning of the play, really. I think that's what prompted him to do the play. For Warren it was a way to find out his roots I guess and what happened. And, it kind of made the rest of us question things.

Warren, you might recall, is Cathy's youngest brother who was adopted as an infant. He wrote a story, entitled "Stone's Cove", exploring his own experience of separation from the family (see MacPhail, 1990). A couple of years later, he wrote a play called "Abandon Hope: Mabel Dorothy" (see MacPhail, 1992) which dug deeper into his personal journey. Here, Cathy is saying that this point – when she was a grown woman with a family and a career, decades after the deaths of her mother, father, and sister – is the beginning. How can that be?

It is the beginning of her new story. The old one is clearly still in play, but now there is an alternative. And it seems the more she engages with this progressive narrative, the more of a role it plays in her lived experiences. Even though she identifies her visit with Warren as the starting point, as she engages with this perspective, suddenly her past prior to that visit changes as well: she begins seeing glimpses of this story even in her own childhood, which had been previously characterized in such a different way. For example, after Cathy had lived unhappily in Halifax for five years, she was to visit her oldest sister Violet (who was raising Roy in Newfoundland) for one summer. Here is what happened at the end of that summer:

I had my ticket to go back [to Halifax], of course. And [brother] Fred came out to Chapel Arm to get me. And they must've thought I was a maniac because I mean, I got hysterical. I was prepared to go, and I remember getting under the bed. Here I was almost 16 years old, and I guess it just hit me what I was going back to, I don't know. Anyway I got so hysterical that they let me stay. I lived with them, I did grade 11 in Norman's Cove and then the next year I went to university.

What is perhaps even more intriguing is what comes next:

And I think I had made up my mind before I came down that what I wanted to do was go to university in Newfoundland and become a teacher. If I had stayed in Halifax, that would not have happened. I would have had to get a job. I would not have gone to university. I know that. Anyway, so that was home until I got married.

In this story, Cathy is not powerlessly coasting through event after event, seeing where life will take her. She is, in fact, an active agent in her life after all. In this narrative, Cathy has constructed an entirely different role for herself. And with it, finally, come possibilities, rather than defeat. Even working within the constraints of social conditions as they are, Cathy manages to live in ways that are meaningful to her, and to see that there are some ways she can change the patterns of loss and forgetting that had been taking hold. As things change in her world (Warren's story for instance, and his play) Cathy, too, finds new ways of relating to her experiences of her childhood losses and has begun to interpret them differently. Much of this has come from conversations that have begun to evolve with her siblings, increasingly initiated by Cathy herself. She describes the shift that is taking place within her with these interactions: "... And so in those times I [would] just think about the fact that I don't have it, so it's a negative feeling ... But [now] to be able to talk about it, there's a more positive feeling there. There's a happier feeling, I think."

She has also been getting creative and finding new ways to connect with her past relationships in the here and now:

The reason I went through this [photo] album is because I have so few memories.

I had an email from the Grand Bank heritage society because two years ago we all contributed to this Mariner's Memorial, and I decided that I wanted to contribute more this year.

I sent them all [the siblings] the email about instead of going to this dinner, getting a hall and having a family dinner.

When I was telling him that I had no memories about my sister's funeral, he [a brother] said he thinks that this memorial thing will really, really help because there was nothing for my father. But I think that alone – it'll help - but I still think we need this outburst of what's inside all of us ... I think if my sister and my brothers and I could just talk that everybody would feel, well, 'I'm not the only one who feels this way' and we won't be always searching for something.

So in the past few years, you know it's coming together.

This is clearly not the same passive person that was characterized in the first narrative. Cathy, in this unfolding progressive narrative is an active, strong, engaged woman who is learning what she needs and is finding ways to access it.

By illustrating with just a few examples of how Harvey, Roy, and Cathy have all come to make meaning of their losses differently, I hope to have perhaps added one more layer to the ways we might understand their experiences. It is not only the events that occur in the world that determine how we live in it. It seems to me that by overlooking this perspective, we may be missing a significant component of what we are hoping to learn from the stories these participants have shared with us: that "how we manage to see ourselves and the world ... will make a huge difference in the way things unfold" (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 1).

My mind is absolutely racing. It is pitch dark now, but I am wide awake – energized.

This time, I do not get up from the computer. My analysis still doesn't quite feel complete, and I wonder if I have missed the mark. Should I delete what I have written? I sit with myself and wait, slowly beginning to trust this process.

Finally, it comes. "That perspective was very helpful, and the points raised are important to consider."¹⁷ But now that you have come this far," I hear the voice inside me tentatively leading me into unknown territory, "it would now be negligent not to travel its full course, to the best of your abilities. You have to acknowledge one very important, but complicating truth."

I realize my heart is racing, too.

"As an interviewer, and perhaps more importantly, as the daughter and niece of the interview participants, are you not part of their contexts? Are you not also a player in that dialogue that contributes to the construction of their interpretations and experiences?"

17 As suggested by McKendry (2003), debate can be "devisive, coercive and non-collaborative" and hence an often "problematic and ineffective mode of reaching social consensus" (p. 1). Thus, I aim to demonstrate how discussion (as opposed to debate), when engaged in intentionally and respectfully, can both honour existing forms of thought (that have, after all, allowed us to reach the current position) and offer alternatives. This particular discursive practice is referred to by Gergen (2001) as a "transpositional hermeneutic" (n.p.) Gergen recommends that in discussions, if positive change and mutual understanding are in fact our intentions, then we might see fit to "first recognize ways in which an offering might indeed be salutary in certain respects, before demonstrating its problematic potentials" (n.p.). This can facilitate forward motion in dialogue rather than "the impassable debate produces" when differences in interpretation or perspective occur (McKendry, 2003, p. 2).

I realize the uneasy feeling of tension inside me seems to be shifting. My body relaxes a little.¹⁸ No longer fighting it, this has become a ride I enjoy.¹⁹

I am coming to view their stories of grief and loss through a hermeneutic lens ...

*

¹⁸ I would like to draw attention to the "felt sense" which has been described as "a kind of bodily awareness that profoundly influences our lives" (Gendlin, 1981, p. 32). This can serve as a reminder that grief, and other emotional responses, are not necessarily entirely mental reactions.

¹⁹ The mental shifts occurring throughout the dialogue are intended to reflect the value of a hermeneutic approach to research: opening the mind and thus opportunities for fuller exploration and alternative actions.

The Lens of Hermeneutics

Before getting into specifics of their particular experiences, or even grief in general, perhaps a slight shift in perspective is necessary. Two specific concerns emerge as I make this shift:

In order to better understand something – in this case experiences of childhood loss – I have to immerse myself in it. But if I believe in the relational perspective previously presented, by so engaging with it, am I not in some way changing it? How, then, am I to gain knowledge about anything? A second, but related concern might be: if I accept the complexity of the relationship between individuals and their social worlds in the processes of interpreting an experience, then am I not also participating in a similar process as I conduct research? How, then, can I ever truly access any knowledge, other than my *own* interpretations of what is presented to me?

It is true. I cannot leave this discussion without considering my own impact on any sense of learning that I feel may have been achieved. In turn, I must critically consider the value of any social research in light of these perspectives. In order to address these important issues, I will begin with a brief discussion of a philosophical approach known as hermeneutics. I will then relate it first to the interviews that took place and second to the evolving dialogue that has been ensuing about understandings of childhood loss in response to those interviews. I will conclude with some considerations that must be attended to when conducting any research. In particular I will discuss the benefits, difficulties, and complexities of what has frequently been referred to as 'insider research' (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Adler & Adler, in Hertz, 1997).

Hermeneutics is a mode of thinking that first emerged from the difficulties that were being encountered by scholars who attempted to understand the Bible; they were struggling to 'interpret' the word of God (Gergen, 1999). It has since broadened to encompass "the study of the interpretation of texts" (Kvale, 1996, p. 46); and the concept of 'texts' has also broadened, to include discourses and even actions. As a result of these developments, hermeneutics as it currently stands directly relates with what is being contemplated here: how to effectively (if not accurately) interpret and understand meanings generated within research interview conversations about experiences of childhood loss.

The current discussion has been an effort to gain valuable knowledge about how the experience of childhood loss might be interpreted over time. It is, after all, my desire to be of better service to those people I encounter who have faced such difficulties. However, each time it seems I may have reached a point of clearer understanding, another layer is uncovered that has not yet been penetrated in the exploration of the interviews. So it becomes necessary to dig deeper, and I learn that there is yet more to learn. I zoom in, and zoom out – focusing on individuals, and then on grief as a general concept. But each time I find that to understand a part, I need to know more about its context. And I cannot know the context without understanding the individuals and other components that comprise it. Back and forth I continue to go...

This process has been characterized by some philosophers as the "hermeneutic circle" (Ramberg, 2005, n.p.). While there are multiple interpretations of what the hermeneutic circle involves (Gergen, 1999; Kvale, 1996; Ramberg, 2005), which by now

should not surprise me, there are some basic underpinnings that seem to be more or less agreed upon (Kvale, 1996).

One common theme is “the continuous back and forth process between the parts and the whole” of the subject being studied (Kvale, 1996, p. 48). Just as was described above, in order to work towards understanding, this process must occur. Kenneth Gergen (1998) articulates this dizzying movement with an ocean metaphor:

Can we envision, I ask, a condition of pure relatedness, a condition in which - like the ocean - all the individual waves are given form by each other, and we must recognize with awe the potential of a singular movement of the entirety. I shall call this condition a relational sublime. We cannot articulate the character of the sublime, for our languages are themselves only local manifestations of the whole; they cannot account for origins which supersede them in profundity. However, we may with consciousness of the relational sublime perhaps move more comfortably in the world - with less anguish and more tolerance. Rather than charting a singular course for our swim through life - feeling buffeted by the waves, frustrated by our incapacity to make headway, irritated by the squalls that send us helter-skelter - we might, with consciousness of the relational sublime, more properly see ourselves as at one with our surrounds, our bodies moving in multiple directions as we harmonize with the undulations of the grander force. (n.p.)

For me, this metaphor of the ocean is immensely helpful in trying to comprehend what otherwise feels like such an abstract concept. The closer I explore something, the more must be taken into consideration. The ocean from a distance is clearly a mass of water. But moving closer to earth, I see that there are currents and waves that comprise the ocean. Getting closer, I may decide to look at just one wave, but notice that the wave does not exist without the wind. Nor does it exist without the water molecules within it. I can get closer and closer, asking more and more probing questions. While all my questions are clarifying things, none of them bring me to a point where I can say, “Ah-ha! So *that* is the ocean”. So in order to understand the whole I must understand its parts.

But what is a wave without the ocean? It simply does not exist. Therefore, in order to understand the parts, I must also see the whole. And there's more: If I come in even closer and look at where the water meets the shoreline, and keep moving closer and closer ... it soon becomes impossible to discern where the ocean ends and the shoreline begins. Thus, not only do the whole and its parts constantly co-create each other, but so too does everything. Nothing stands alone (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1991).

So far, this perspective supports the process in which I have been engaged. It reminds me to consider layers, entertain alternative perspectives, and engage in dialogue. I can feel good about what I have been doing.

If I continue to follow this line of thinking, however, it can also remind me of my own oversight in this process thus far. I realize that "an interpretation of a text is not presuppositionless" (Kvale, 1996, p. 49), another common theme among hermeneutic thinkers. For it is what I know about the whole that allows me to interpret the parts, and vice versa. This is where I must realize that even my own interpretations are not free of judgements and assumptions. I am reminded that "there is no articulable, communicable stance for us to take that is *utterly* outside of traditions" (Kamarck Minnich, 2005, p. 76, emphasis in original). Thus, the extension of this line of thinking forces me to acknowledge that I, too, am undergoing a similar process of co-constructing my own reality as I hear, interpret, and discuss the stories of my participants (Peavy, 2004).

It seems to follow that "hermeneutics is then doubly relevant to interview research, first by elucidating the dialogue producing the interview texts to be interpreted, and then by clarifying the subsequent process of interpreting the interview texts

produced” (Kvale, 1996, p. 46). A more positivist approach to research views it as a process by which I might access an accurate reading or interpretation of someone else’s experience (Kvale, 1996). If this were my view, then for this research to be considered valuable would require “access to the mind of the author/actor” (Gergen, 1999, p. 143), which, of course, is not mine to be had. I must instead accept that the only mind to which I have access is my own, and in fact the only knowledge to which I have access is my own interpretation. As a result, all knowledge is “partial ... both in the sense of being incomplete ... and [in the sense of being] motivated or shaped by individual social agendas” (Greene & Hogan, 2005, p. 178).

Does this lead me to conclude that any kind of social research is thus without merit? Does it mean that it gives me no deeper level of understanding and this process has been a waste of time, energy, and paper? Absolutely not, say those who identify with a hermeneutic perspective. In fact, it is by acknowledging the intimacy between researcher and the research – that is, the fact that by researching I actually have the capacity to touch the subject which I am studying in quite a direct way – that I can now see even more potential for the pragmatic value of social research (Gergen, 1999; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Rather than simply being an individual mental exercise, the hermeneutic perspective sees thinking itself as social action. Research becomes an act of “learning from others” as opposed to “studying” them when a relational perspective of knowing is embraced (Kamarck Minnich, 2005, p. 268). It also becomes very closely relevant to practice when viewed through this lens, as the relational element of the process must be acknowledged.

While hermeneutic thinking does not encourage me to discard the act of aspiring to 'know', it does have me rethink my goals in doing so. In accepting that "meaning" is not something out there for me to simply access, but is "an emergent property of coordinated action" I must put any possessive ideas about knowledge aside (Gergen, 1999, p. 145). Rather than being something 'out there' for me to grasp, and then pass on to others, knowledge from this perspective is a new creation entirely, and "successful interpretation, then, brings forth new worlds" (p. 145). These new creations can only be brought about through dialogue, through the interactions between and among people and their contexts (Hoskins, 2003). On my own, without shared knowledge and ideas (such as language, for instance) I do not have the capacity to think or to know. Thus, the act of seeking information or gaining knowledge – the process of researching – is more about *how* I engage in that process than what the finished product becomes. It is when I engage in these knowledge-generating dialogues that true learning occurs. While my learning may not bring me closer to knowing the world in definite terms, it may – if I do so with mindfulness – bring me closer to understanding how to better move within it (Gergen, 1999; Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Therefore, research is not solely about thinking and is not solely about acting. It is a conversation in which "thinking and acting together" give "us experiences of freedom and of community" (Kamarck Minnich, 2005, p. 275). Such conversation is "not only a means to an end" but a process by which these experiences, and new ideas, are generated (p. 275).

Again, these 'conclusions' require that I acknowledge that they too are merely pieces of an on-going dialogue. Just as previous worldviews have contributed to the

existence of this mode of thinking, so will hermeneutics likely transform into something further. Its “emphasis on the temporality and incompleteness of all understanding” is not a deficit, but a strength (Gergen, 1999, p. 145). For by acknowledging the fluidity of knowledge I can more openly engage in conversations around ideas, without defensiveness or ownership over any of them. I can also aim to be more intentional about the ways in which I choose to engage in, or remain outside of, certain conversations (McKendry, 2003). This allows me to let go of the desire for absolute control, and enables me to act more honestly. Herein lie the promise and potential of a hermeneutic outlook.

This brings me to the next point, before I refer once again to the interviews. As was briefly pointed out, the relationship between the researcher and participants in the case of the interviews with Harvey, Roy, and Cathy is not only familiar – it is familial. Conducting research within a group to which one belongs comes with a lot of responsibilities, but with those – perhaps as a result of them – come great opportunities for learning.

By moving in this direction, an emphasis on not only the processes of interpretation engaged in by the participants is necessary; my own processes of interpretation are also a consideration of paramount importance. There is a responsibility to consider that my own lens exists in qualitative research of any kind (Greenbank, 2003) but it is especially significant when conducting 'insider research' (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). When there are personal relationships with research participants, researchers often become more diligent about ensuring they do all they can to understand what participants

are hoping to share with them, and to represent them fairly (Adler & Adler, in Hertz, 1997). For this reason, researchers are often more thorough and rigorous with their analysis when conducting research with participants who are members of their own community (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

“Fear of offending” research participants is often a major hurdle for social researchers (Hoskins and Stoltz, 2005, p. 97). Again, while this fear is likely increased significantly when conducting insider research, it might also be expected that because of this, the analysis will thus be more thorough and careful. More consideration will be given to one’s own biases and assumptions than might otherwise be the case, which is, as we have seen, an important aspect of hermeneutic analysis.

When conducting research from within a familiar group, one's presuppositions might more quickly and readily make their way to the surface – perhaps even into the conversation – since with at least partially common contextual realities, memories and shared knowledge will likely contribute to the discussion (Clements, 1999). Again, this aligns well with a hermeneutic process, since we are encouraged to consider those underlying assumptions from this perspective. When they become a part of the interview conversation itself, it is impossible not to address them. Thus, it seems that, intentionally or not, the fact that this research was conducted within the family of the researcher can bring to the research layers of considerations and reflection that may not have otherwise existed. In fact, while it may on the surface seem to be the opposite, after exploring from a hermeneutic perspective, insider research may in fact be said to add rigor to the research process (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

Again, this shift in perspective requires me to move my goal from uncovering answers to engaging in conversation and generating new possibilities (Gergen, 1999). In so doing, I can see that inviting known participants might facilitate this process. A certain level of trust is necessary for people to step out into this unknown ground together. But if done respectfully, the process does not have to be one in which a participant is opening his or her mind to be analyzed. I can, instead, “remove meaning from the heads of individuals and locate it within the ways in which we go on together” (Gergen, 1999, p. 145). In so doing, conversation (meaning both the interview itself and the dialogue that occurs in attempting to 'analyze' it) becomes “a new beginning and, indeed, an enactment, a practice of the ends we seek” (Kamarck Minnich, 2005, p. 276).

Having said all of that, how does this manifest itself in the interviews with Cathy, Roy, and Harvey? In order to look at these interviews from this perspective, it is helpful to recall the hermeneutic circle: To understand the interview interactions, we must consider the contexts in which they occurred both prior to and following the interviews (Kvale, 1996). How do our prior relationships and shared history impact the interview itself? Does our role in the interview impact what knowledge is shared or generated about their experiences of childhood loss? The next part of the circular process is to move forward with it: How, in turn, does the act of engaging in interviews further impact that context? Are there changes in the ongoing experience or interpretations of these losses as a result of the interviews having taken place?

I will begin with the first part of this puzzle. It has been suggested that in all qualitative research it is important that “researchers evaluate their own influence on the

research process" (Greenbank, 2003, p. 795). Since it is increasingly being accepted that the relationship (or lack of relationship) between a researcher and participant will impact what is shared and how it is shared (Greenbank, 2003), I must examine how this takes place with my research participants.

They each express in very direct terms that my 'insider' status within the stories being shared, as well as my personal relationships with the participants, enables them to share more freely than would have otherwise been the case. Roy says:

I wouldn't be able to talk to anyone else, someone that wasn't part of the family like this, you know. You seem to understand everything I'm saying, and that makes it OK to talk. And that's why I'm being so open with you, sharing my emotions, sharing my feelings with you, because if you were not seeming to understand me, well, I wouldn't continue on.

To you, Janet, I feel comfortable in saying whatever – I wouldn't not say something because you're you. I would be right open. And that makes me feel good too.

Cathy shares a similar sentiment: "You've heard most of this before ...because I can just talk to you." When I ask Harvey if our being family has impacted his interview experience he says, "It makes it easier. I wouldn't have done it for anybody else."

So it seems that, before even considering the interaction, the simple fact of our relationships helps in some ways to provide more access to the emotions and experiences associated with the losses endured by these participants. Do these relationships impact the ways in which we engage with the subject of their losses? Do they influence the kind of information obtained? Again, by all three accounts, the answer is yes. Whether this is a detriment or a benefit, or both, it seems that all of them want in some way to help me with my studies by participating in these interviews. At the beginning of his second

interview, Harvey suggests that we “just get into the things that you [the interviewer] need to talk about.”

Cathy, leading up to the interviews and even during them, seems concerned with not being able to provide me with information that will be helpful. Before the interviews, she prepared by looking through albums and initiating conversations with siblings and aunts. At the end of the first interview she worries, “But I mean, can you get anything from that?” And at the end of the second, final interview, she admits, “We talked about more than I thought we would. I thought there wouldn't be anything.”

Roy also tells me: “I didn't think I could add too much, but I would do whatever I could for you.” At the end of our first interview he seems concerned and says, “See I'm not sure if the stuff I'm after saying is relevant.”

In these ways, I have to also acknowledge the possibility that the information I have received is edited in some ways because they want to give me information that will be helpful to me. Gubrium and Holstein (1998) remind me to not only consider the content of a story, but also the form. In other words, a story is more than a presentation of past events: it is a “composition” (p. 166) and how it is composed is in some ways as important as what is being said. Just as I feel more of a vested interest in these interviews because of the close relationship between my participants and me, so do they. What and how they share with me is contingent on our relationships. As a result, there are many instances in which they ask me if I follow their thinking, they rephrase things, and they steer us back to the topic they think I want to hear most about: the deaths of their parents. In these ways, it is certainly helpful to consider these interview conversations as

relational processes rather than simply a gathering of data. It is truly a matter of interpretation, as we all attempt to interpret one another's meanings and intentions during the interview process.

Interestingly, Harvey had been interviewed several months prior for a magazine article in which he shares many details of his personal losses as a child (see Richardson, 2006). In his interview with me, he raises the topic of interviewer/participant relationship, based on his own experience within that previous interview process. During our discussion, he raises some interesting points about his story as a composition:

When I was interviewed for my magazine, the story she wrote is entirely different than the story that I initially had. This is the third draft. Well, it started out as an ego trip ... I didn't start out that way; that's the way [the interviewer] Katie interpreted it. And when I got it, I called her up and I said, 'You know, I can understand why you might have gotten that from our conversation ... it really isn't the way that I feel at all.' So it went from the ego trip to a combination of the ego-trip and focus on family and finally settled in on the focus on family.

Here Harvey highlights the relational element of knowledge-making processes. Even though Katie, the woman writing the article, was collecting information, she must have been quite aware that this information was not an object waiting for her to find it. How she and her participant (Harvey) engaged with it directly impacted what knowledge was accessed and shared. And what of that final product? Well, it seems, it was not final after all. The process of interpretation did not begin with Harvey's speaking and end with Katie's writing:

I didn't really set out with the idea of this being a testimony to my life or my faith, but a lot of people [readers] saw it that way. A lot of people saw this as a testimony to my faith. That wasn't the purpose of this at all. It was an expression of where I've come from and to where I am, and to why it happened. That's all I wanted to do.

Although they had painstakingly discussed and written three drafts, still there were readers who interpreted the article differently than Harvey or Katie intended for it to be read. Not only did Harvey's sharing of his story impact readers who had experienced similar losses, but he considers that interview – as well as his interviews with me – to now be significant parts of his own process of making meaning of and re-experiencing his own childhood losses in new ways:

I've only opened up about my past three times. So the first time was when I opened up to myself – that experience I had at the camp. Remember, I told you about that, where I ended up grieving the loss of Dad, right? So that's the first time that I ever opened up and started to come to reality and come to terms with my inner turmoil with that.

The second time was probably, to some very small degree, with Katie. I mean, there were things that I shared with her that aren't in that book, obviously, because I felt very comfortable sharing with her because I know she had a very similar experience in her life. Not quite as dramatic, but she did have a very similar experience.

And then the next time was last week when we did that [first interview]. I think every time you share, every time you do that, it helps you. I think that's why I was excited about doing this because I recognized how important it was. I just think every time you do that it's a big thing.

So, here I am, trying to learn about his experience, and he is telling me that by sharing it with me, his experience has now somehow changed? This sounds very much to reflect the hermeneutic perspective outlined earlier. Cathy, too, seems to feel something similar. Prior to the interviews, she made some phone calls to her brothers, sister, cousin, and aunt, trying to find some of the missing pieces of her past. She was preparing for the interviews, but in so doing, changing her experience. Suddenly, the conversations she had previously craved were slowly beginning to occur. When she tells me that things are slowly changing - "coming together" - and I ask her what is allowing the change to occur she says, "I think your doing this." And when we finish both our interviews, she

confides: "I'm really glad to have been able to do this. I think it's helped – it'll help. Just to be able – I mean, I've never expressed these things before. I've had it all in here [*pointing to chest*]."

Roy also states that these interviews have provided him with an opportunity to share his emotional experiences of his losses with somebody else:

It's good for me. I like this because it gives me an opportunity to reflect on things. Cathy and I have had some conversations like this, but not for long, you know.

I was just glad that I spent the time talking to you and reflecting on it myself. I liked it: thinking about something and verbalizing that thought to someone ... because I had not talked about it much before.

For each participant, then, the process of interviewing in itself has shifted their experiences of their losses. Harvey says, about both his interview with Katie and his interview with me: "Oh, this was like therapy. I thought, 'You know what? If it never gets down in print, I've had the opportunity to discuss it with her' like we're discussing this here." Therefore, it is impossible for me to proceed as though I can understand the subject of childhood loss through these interviews. Instead, what I can hope to do is learn from my participants through our shared experiences with these interviews (Kamarck Minnich, 2005), always remaining open to the awareness that the process is in no way over, and there will always be more to learn, as meanings continue to unfold.

In fact, not only do the interviews change their internal experiences, but as with Cathy's process of initiating new conversations, it will likely impact their lives in very real ways. For instance, during our first interview, Roy tells me he wishes they could speak together as siblings about their losses. He feels it will not happen, as does Cathy, because there simply will not be an opportunity. However, halfway through our second

interview, Roy says, "I don't know how we can get around it, get to having an open sort of a retreat with the family." By the end of that interview, Roy has decided to send an invitation to his brothers and sisters in order to create an opportunity for such conversations.

This research has clearly been a valuable opportunity for me to learn, but to make a conclusion of any kind would not only be premature, it would miss the point entirely. Their experiences with their childhood losses continue to unfold, even now. They continue to make meaning of their losses in new ways. It is the very fact that a conclusion is not to be made that has made this such a rich opportunity for learning.

*

The house is so silent I hesitate to even move. I take a deep breath and stand to look at the night sky outside the window.

Although I do not doubt the trustworthiness of what has been explored, it seems that if this is indeed the perspective I am currently holding, then I am left to struggle with some difficult questions. Where do I go from here? If I return to my original curiosity, what learning has come of this process? Does this hermeneutic approach serve any function in the real world? The questions are endlessly presenting themselves in my mind, without answers to accompany them.

But I feel a sense of promise with this perspective. I want to believe in it, but I have yet to make whatever connection is there that will allow me to. I haven't come to any practical application of this, but find myself feeling hope that did not exist before.

The voice inside me begins to slowly tap into it. "If we are all connected in a relational matrix, co-creating our world and each other's with everything we say and do, then for you to try to define childhood grief and have a final say would be futile. As soon as the words leave your mouth you have invited a response that will immediately change the world that you would have been describing (Gergen, 1999)."

I understand and I agree, but still cannot yet envision the potential of this when it comes to practice. Where is this going?

"Because of that," the voice carries on, working its way toward the promise of this perspective. "You can let go of the pressure to be 'right', and simply focus on how to contribute in a positive way. Through discourse and dialogue, positive change can occur. By engaging in interviews with your mother and uncles, the process has already begun. You don't have to wait to see how to act – you have acted. Several dialogues have been opened: internally, among the participants, and among others, demonstrating the impact local discourses may have on social consciousness."

I notice I'm sitting up straighter, on the edge of my seat, literally. I need this connection explicitly drawn for me.

And here it is. "By considering a matrix of related elements, even if you haven't shared the same loss as a child with whom you hope to connect, you can still reach each other. It is through connection that understanding begins to occur, not the other way around. You do not have to know all there is to know about loss to help a child. You have to know the child to understand his or her loss. It is only then that your presence may somehow serve that child in a positive way.

I see. The tension leaves my body and I fall back into my chair.²⁰

And I begin to explore the implications of their stories on practice with grief and

loss ...

*

20 Including details about the physical space and the bodily experiences of this dialogue has been intentional. For me, as well as for my participants, it seems there is not necessarily a clear line between the experiences of the mind and body, though we often speak as though there is. By including these physical descriptions I hope to cast some light on and encourage consideration of “the in between of the body/mind divide” (Somerville, 2004, p. 52; see also Mahoney, 2003). Moreover, I would like to highlight the possibility that “body can intervene in discourse just as discourse can intervene into body” (p. 51), as bodily reactions can both entice us to further engage and prevent us from exploring further. The absence of their father’s body has had a deep impact on the experiences of grief for all three of my interview participants. In addition, they all discuss bodily responses, in some way or another, to their own grief. Thus, bringing the bodily dimension of such experiences to the foreground, at least temporarily, seems appropriate.

Implications for Practice

As mentioned previously, the key shift in thinking that has occurred has been a move from prioritizing an understanding of grief and loss in order to connect with a child to prioritizing understanding a child in order to be a supportive presence within their experiences of grief and loss. This is not to say that it is not important to learn what we can of grief outside of an individual's experiences. In fact, thorough hermeneutic interpretation demands "extensive knowledge of the theme so that the interviewer [or as the case may be, practitioner] may be sensitive to the nuances of meanings expressed and the different contexts into which meaning may enter" (Kvale, 1996, p.49). However, the goal in doing so is to better equip us to understand individual meanings, not to generalize individual experiences.

As I struggle to relate this process to practice, I notice that in many ways I am applying Child and Youth Care perspectives to the experiences of grief and loss in particular. The CYC approach distinguishes itself from others with its emphasis on relational practice (Fewster, 2006; Garfat, 2003; Krueger, 1994). That is, CYC practice requires investment of 'self' to some degree in the relationships through which positive change is said to occur (Fewster, 2002; Krueger, 1997). Furthermore, embracing such a relational approach gives us more opportunity to engage with a child as embedded within a context (family, for example) rather than taking an individualistic and linear approach to experiences and change (Garfat, 2003).

I must (sadly) differentiate here between jargon and practice. I am not talking of manipulatively "using relationship" in order to steer a child down a normalizing path,

although that is sometimes how it manifests itself in this profession (Fewster, 2006, p. 64). On the contrary, relationship is “more about communion than communication – caring about rather than taking care of” (p. 65). When the mutuality of the word relationship is embraced fully, the essence of this approach encourages us to “dismantle the pretences and step boldly into the black hole of uncertainty ... only from this place can we invite others to do likewise” (p. 65). This view of a helping relationship is encouraged by Henry Maier (1979) with his idea of rhythmicity, which suggests that such an interaction involves not only ‘doing for’, but ‘doing with’ another person. It requires levels of authenticity, involvement, and compassion above and beyond simply trying to help somebody solve problems, and moves us away from the tendency to pathologize struggles. It requires of practitioners that we “sense as well as see what is going on” (Krueger, 1997, p. 158).

Theoretically, the CYC relational approach to care merges quite naturally with grief work, when viewed through a hermeneutic lens. But we still have not determined what this might look like in practice. To a large extent, Child and Youth Care practice still occurs within contexts that are dominated by modes of thinking that are not necessarily relational, but are driven by policies that have been informed by developmental psychology, leading the relational CYC approach to remain an addendum to pre-established systems (Fewster, 2006). This is potentially beneficial in that it allows Child and Youth Care practitioners to make their way into existing systems, ideally transforming those systems by bringing relational practice to multiple disciplines. Unfortunately, this can often feel like swimming upstream for individuals working

without a network of likeminded peers (Savicki, 1993), and burnout or even self doubt can eventually lead CYC practitioners to simply adapt to the dominant discourse and approach to practice within their current workplace. Thus, it is not always easy to visualize how such practice might manifest itself when working with grieving children in these contexts.

The current study in which Cathy, Harvey, and Roy share their experiences of making meaning of childhood losses, and in which I reflect on my own experience of engaging with them in this process, holds (at least) three significant implications for practice upon which I will focus my attention here. First, it has contributed to a dialogue and further exploration in a way that can help to close the gap between rhetoric and practice when it comes to engaging relationally with grieving children. Second, my process of interpreting their stories through multiple lenses enables further consideration of the role of the practitioner in helping relationships, particularly in the context of working with children who are grieving a loss. Third, the narrative approach utilized in this research lends itself to practice as well, as it is often through stories that practitioners and those they support make meaning of interactions and experiences (Krueger, 1997).

Engaging Relationally in Research and Practice

In addressing the first implication, it may have been noticed by the reader that as the discussion moved towards the concept of meaning making it also moved further away from childhood loss in particular. For me, this can be considered a strength of the study, as it reminds us that viewing 'children' as one group of people and 'adults' as another is not accurate, and is not always helpful. As my participants demonstrate repeatedly,

childhood experiences make their way into adult lives and conversely, shifts in understanding that occur during adulthood make their way into how childhood events are felt and remembered. By viewing our roles with children in the context of not only their current situations, but also in the context of their lifespan, we may better be of service to those we wish to help. By dividing children's lives from those of adults we run the risk of simplifying and fragmenting experiences that are in fact not separate at all.

For instance, although my participants were aware that the research I was conducting centred on their experiences of childhood loss, each of them brought to the discussion many other experiences – some that occurred at the time of the losses, some before, and some much later. This is necessary for them in order to effectively make meaning of their experiences in ways that allow room for the complexity they entail. I will demonstrate this with examples from both Roy and Cathy.

As Roy describes how he experienced the loss of his father, he incorporates past events, events that took place at that time, and future understandings of what occurred:

And the loss of my father, it was in the fall. Well, of course it was November. The first thing was news. They lost reception; they can't make contact with the Mabel Dorothy. That was the first day. And the next day, they still can't find her, but no worries, she'll turn up. And I was expecting him to walk in the door any time at all, which he did from time to time. You know, you'd lose contact with him. This was my perception: You'd lose contact with him, no big deal, he'll turn up. They'd lost contact [before]. Or maybe – I don't know if it happened or they said it happened. So there's nothing to worry about. They'll make contact with her one of those days, or maybe tomorrow. And this kept going on, it seemed to me like a long time. Maybe tomorrow. Oh yeah, he'll turn up. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe tomorrow. Always maybe tomorrow.

Now, getting back to the loss. In November, the word came in that we lost contact with the Mabel Dorothy. But never mind, she'll turn up. She'll turn up. And that kept going on for, well that feeling, that memory, the possibility of him coming back never stopped. And even if I, half asleep and half awake now, not being conscious enough to reason with yourself, you know, sometimes you're like

that. Even now, or not so much right now, today, but in recent years, the possibility of me opening my eyes and Dad coming around the corner is there ... because they never found any bodies.

The past experiences with the ship being temporarily lost on several occasions before, the future complication of never recovering his body, and all of the uncertainty that lay in between are significant to how Roy has made sense of the death of his father. As a child, he did not necessarily reflect on all of these contextual factors (indeed some of them were not yet at play), but that does not mean they are not significant considerations. Those who might wish to be of support for a child in Roy's situation would do well to keep in mind that his father's death did not occur in isolation. Looking around at what may be impacting his experience of that death could help practitioners more effectively respond to a child like Roy in ways that might be meaningful to him, both in the moment and as he continues in the future to make sense of his losses. Bringing relational Child and Youth Care practice into grief work with children might allow practitioners to broaden the view of a child's experience and more effectively engage in a way that resonates with that child.

In sharing her experience of the death of her mother, Cathy also demonstrates the importance of viewing childhood loss in the context of the lifespan:

When she was pregnant with me, as I said, we lived in an isolated place. So she went to [a hospital in] a place called Come By Chance and I was due in September and she had to go by boat and then by road. So she had to go before the waters got too rough; she went a month before I was born. In the meantime, she had a three year old at home, and a six year old, and then Betty and Violet. Anyway, she became depressed and she became suicidal. I didn't know that for a long time. After I was born she went home and couldn't care for me. So Jean's mother, Aunt Allie, my father's sister ... looked after me for three months and named me. I felt very close to Aunt Allie.

[After moving to Grand Bank], Warren was born. Kent was two years old. So I spent a lot of my time home; I was the only girl. There were five boys. So I spent more days at home than I did in school. I was in grade six.

[After moving to Halifax] I made friends and one girl that I was really close to ... her mother was Norwegian, and they lived just over the street from us. I used to spend a lot of time at her house. Her mother seemed very involved with her life. ... I can see her now, her mother sitting, doing her hair, and this kind of thing. And maybe I used to envy her, I don't know. But I thought that was so cool.

But, my mother was in St. John's, dead. My oldest sister was there, my oldest brother was there. None of the rest of us were there. So, you know, it's just talk. My mother is dead.

[Now] I go to visit the grave when I want to. When I'm in St. John's and want to, I go visit the grave. And we've kept it up and it helps ... because I know she's not there, but her body was there.

It's still with us. When I'm with friends and they talk about different recipes or, "my mother used to do it this way" or you know, "this is what my mother used to say". I don't remember anything, I don't remember anything. And I should. I was old enough to, and I mean I was certainly around her enough.

Just as Roy finds himself incorporating past, present, and future events as he interprets the meaning of the death of his father, so does Cathy when she discusses her mother's death. How Cathy experienced and experiences the loss of her mother does not only involve her own relationship with her mother, or the events that occurred at the time of her mother's death. The meaning she gives to this loss also includes such complex considerations as relationships with other family members (such as her Aunt Allie), what she sees around her in other girls' relationships with their mothers (both in Halifax directly following her mother's death and as an adult as she interacts with friends), how those around her responded to the loss, and even the circumstances around her own birth, among other things.

As practitioners, we are again reminded by Cathy's story to keep in mind that grief does not go away. Our roles with grieving children must not solely revolve around helping children comprehend death or re-establish a sense of normalcy in their daily

lives. We also need to bear in mind the value of helping memories live and finding ways of establishing different and ongoing relationships with the deceased loved ones. This way, we can contribute towards helping children equip themselves to respond to subsequent grief well into their lives, long after our contact with them may have ended.

Both Roy's and Cathy's experiences provide even more evidence of the importance of approaching childhood loss holistically, just as adult grief is increasingly being addressed. In other words, their stories further demonstrate the need for a relational approach to be employed with children who are grieving a loss. As they make sense of the many losses that occurred when they were children, all three participants incorporate a multitude of influences that span their lifetime. Of course, when engaging with children who are grieving a loss we are not cognizant of all of these contextual elements – nor are they. However, by developing an awareness that those contexts will at least partially be comprised of our relationship with them, we may be better able to relate in meaningful and respectful ways.

The Role of Reflexivity in Research and Practice

This brings me to the second implication for practice that emerged from this study. Moving the spotlight from the participants to the researcher for a moment can help to shed some light on the role of practitioners when attempting to embrace a relational approach to grief work – without reflecting on one's own role in relational practice, the responsibility this kind of engagement entails has not been fully accepted. Relating with children with this approach means humbly acknowledging that willingness to adapt has to be part of what practitioners bring to the table as well; all of the "give" cannot be coming

from one side of the relationship. Before I can determine how to best engage in such a relationship, I must put some time and energy into reflecting on what I, as an individual, am bringing with me to it.

In order to consider what this might look like, I experimented with various lenses when attempting to 'interpret' the stories shared by my participants. In so doing, this research became "a practice of the end [I] seek" (Kamarck Minnich, 2005, p. 276), as the relational process is not only relevant to practice, but research as well. The meaning I give to the stories shared by my participants is at least partly dependant on the lens through which I view those stories. Although for the sake of clarity I separated those lenses into distinct perspectives, the truth is it is not that simple. In my experience, these (and limitless other) perspectives are constantly at play – some of which I am aware of, others I certainly am not.

Thus, developing an awareness of what biases I hold, what cultural norms are at play for my participants and me, and how all of these perspectives inform each other, can help me to be more attentive and intentional (Kabat-Zinn, 2005) as a researcher. In the same way, it can help me to become more aware, mindful, and intentional as a practitioner. I will demonstrate this by discussing some examples from Harvey's story, particularly as he interprets his multiple losses (which include the deaths of his parents and sister, as well as his separation from the rest of his family):

My last memory was him [father] walking out the door with a brown leather jacket and a bald head. And I could see him walking out the door. My last memory of my mother, of course, was her laying in the hospital bed and telling me to be a good boy for Aunt Elsie, because she knew that's where I was going.

The burden of the thing was eased a little bit by all those new adventures [that came with moving to Halifax]. But, it was still a very traumatic time. I mean,

when I got to Halifax and the first night I went to bed and everything was all calmed down and reality set in, it was like, "Wow, this is bad."

It was mind boggling. And to me, it was like, you've lost your mother and your father and all your brothers and sisters, 'cause now I'm alone. And, at ten years of age ... this was overwhelming. It was scary. It was really, really scary.

You know this is terrible to say this, but I remember when she [sister, Betty] died, but I guess I was so hardened to it by then that it didn't hit me as hard as it would've if I hadn't been.

I'm not so sure it ever stops being difficult. Now, having said that, every single bit of that made me stronger. ... I realized when I was eleven years old, that if I was going to amount to anything it was going to start with me.

Remember when I said about seeing Dad walk out the door with his brown leather jacket on and a bald head? I lived with that for... from the time I was ten til the time I was fifty. ... I think it's things that I carried with me that hindered me from being able to concentrate on how I really felt about Dad, as opposed to the circumstances that caused me to think poorly about it. Do you know what I mean?

I believe that for me personally, I think I needed that self closure. Everybody's going to have a different type of closure. To me, now that I've experienced that closure myself, now I think I'm able to sit down and talk about it as a family. I'm not so sure that I could have done that as openly before as I can now.

I was excited about doing it [participating in this research]. I wouldn't have done it for anybody else.

These experiences have already been discussed through the four perspectives elaborated on in this paper. The developmental perspective emphasizes Harvey's age and stage of development at the time of his losses in order to make sense of them. The perspective that considers culture and context explores how the world around Harvey directed him in certain ways leading up to and during the time he was grieving these deaths and separations. The social constructionist perspective considers Harvey's engagement with that context and other discourses in co-constructing his ongoing experiences with loss. Finally, the hermeneutic approach highlights the importance of considering not only how Harvey has come to interpret his losses, but also the awareness that my own interpretations are what frame the picture I am creating as I hear his story.

In turn, these interpretations will inform how I might relate with someone in Harvey's situation.

However, as has previously been discussed, the separation of these into separate lenses is a simplification of what might really be going on. Instead, I simultaneously hold multiple perspectives, and my worldview may even be somewhat coloured by those perspectives I think I have previously discarded for new ones. In addition, I am constantly being introduced to new ways of relating with the world. Thus, not only is Harvey's experience with his grief constantly changing, but so is my approach to a helping relationship as I, too, am embedded in a relational matrix. This means the perspectives that I hold will have implications in how I engage with children who are struggling with loss. Perhaps developing my awareness of what lenses might inform my worldview can enable me to be more intentional with how, if, and when I employ certain perspectives as a practitioner.

Let me demonstrate with Harvey's story above. Imagine for a moment that Harvey is not my uncle. Instead, pretend I have been asked to spend time with him because he is having difficulty with his multiple losses:

I will begin by calling attention to his last sentence (above): his enthusiasm over participating in the interviews with me. Knowing that he only shared to the degree that he did because he feels a connection with me (due in this case to our familial relationship), then it seems that before anything else can take place, this (or some) connection has to be there. Regardless of my theoretical understanding of grief or any contextual understanding of his loss, I need to establish some kind of connection with

Harvey. How I do that, however, will be informed, in part, by these lenses. I am reminded of hermeneutic philosophy here, which acknowledges that even as I try to understand something, I cannot help but have an impact on it in some way.

If I encountered Harvey when he was, say, 11 years old, I would approach establishing a connection with him in an entirely different way from how I would if I met him as an adult. Thus, the developmental perspective will have at least some bearing on how I might approach our getting to know each other. In addition, I will consider his context and cultural frames of reference in beginning to establish this relationship. I will take my time and follow his lead in terms of how we set out together. If he has just moved to Halifax and has very recently experienced these losses, he might in fact have limited experience speaking with strangers at all. On the other hand (as Harvey demonstrated in our interviews together), if he'd talked about his losses on several occasions already, perhaps he might even be enthusiastic to share more details of his deceased family members with me – maybe he just wants someone to show some interest. How I proceed will also require consideration of cultural norms. For instance, (as discussed much earlier when describing the interview process for this research) even the type of conversation we engage in may be culturally contingent. My participants were much more at ease when sharing stories with me than when answering questions that required an analytical answer. I will have to spend time with Harvey in order to learn how he is most comfortable communicating with me. Social constructionist views can also impact how I begin developing a relationship with Harvey. For instance, even if I was informed that the reason we are meeting is because of his struggles in coping with

losses, it will be helpful for me to pay attention and learn if this is reflective of how Harvey himself narrates his story. If I insist on making his losses central to our relationship, when in fact he sees them as peripheral to a more pressing issue, then our ability to connect with each other will surely be jeopardized.

It is clear then, even from the very beginning of a relationship, that many perspectives will play a role in how I proceed. Assuming we do succeed in establishing a connection that enables Harvey and me to move forward together, these perspectives and our interactions with them and with each other will continue to be at play.

Simply accepting that these lenses exist is not enough. How they work their ways into our relationship can look many different ways. Without reflexivity in practice, these lenses may steer me without our really understanding how and why Harvey and I are relating the way we are. Lack of attention to my own lenses can lead to careless or mechanical ways of engaging with him that may not always be helpful. For instance, I acknowledged above that developmental psychology may play a role in how I go about getting to know Harvey. However, if I blindly accept developmental perspectives and simply apply them without consideration to context, I may seriously limit my ability to truly hear Harvey's experience and thus my ability to respond in ways that resonate with him will be lessened. Consider this statement again:

You know this is terrible to say this, but I remember when she [sister, Betty] died, but I guess I was so hardened to it by then that it didn't hit me as hard as it would've if I hadn't been.

I'm not so sure it ever stops being difficult. Now, having said that, every single bit of that made me stronger. ... I realized when I was eleven years old, that if I was going to amount to anything it was going to start with me.

If, as occurred earlier in this paper, I chose to assume that Harvey had a limited conception of death because of his young age, I would probably determine that his “hardened” response to his sister’s death meant he simply didn’t comprehend the gravity or the finality of it. Instead, by taking the death of his sister in context and considering all the other losses Harvey had endured at that time, I would see that this was likely not the case. By getting to know and considering his context, my interactions with Harvey would not involve trying to help him understand the finality of his sister’s death. Instead I could spend time developing an understanding of the immense life changes he’d been experiencing and how they were impacting him, including but not limited to Betty’s death.

The value of reflexivity in both research and practice then, is not simply a matter of getting to know the lenses through which I view the world. As I experienced when conducting this research, knowing my lenses is only part of the process. Being open, adaptable, and mindful about how and when I apply them is the next step. By viewing the stories of my participants through multiple lenses, I experienced the value of engaging in research with intention, and saw how this might translate into practice.

Even with participants I know well, share history with, and feel deep care towards, it was necessary to open myself up to their stories, and be willing to adjust my presuppositions throughout the conversations. Because I care so deeply about Cathy, Harvey, Roy, and their stories, I made efforts to check and recheck my assumptions with them (which I may or may not have done successfully). I also tried to see the strengths in what they were sharing with me (Peavy, 2004). And I was very conscious of them as

individuals, and as people with whom I have significant relationships, in every step of this research. For the simple reason that these participants matter so much to me, my primary concern was to do right by them and to treat their experiences with reverence (Hoskins, 1999). And I realize that is exactly what is required in practice. As Kabat-Zinn (2005) states, "Practice gradually, or sometimes even suddenly, transcends all ideas of practice and effort, and whatever effort we put in is no longer effort at all, but really love" (p. 68). And, in the words of the Dalai Lama (1999), "If we reserve ethical conduct for those whom we feel close to, the danger is that we will neglect our responsibilities toward those outside the circle" (p. 125).

The Value of a Narrative Approach

The third implication that results from this study is the potential value of narrative in facilitating more holistic approaches to practice. By hearing the stories of my participants as they chose to share them, and by also considering larger social narratives that may contribute to those stories, I was able to attend not only to "themes and assumptions underlying the discourse, but cultural and contextual understandings" that play a role in how childhood loss is experienced as well (Hansen, 2006, p. 1063). Moreover, by owning that my actions and understandings, too, are shaped in part by the narrative I construct, and that social discourses also impact my own understandings, I can more readily accept my part in a therapeutic relationship. In fact, Cortazzi, Jin, Wall, and Cavendish (2001) observe that even "the sharing [of narratives] helps to recount the events interpreted" (p. 252). In other words, simply telling one's story can help the meaning to emerge. Thus, narrative processes can be beneficial not only for those

seeking support through grief or loss, but also for practitioners in becoming more mindful and intentional in practice.

Therefore, the implications of this research travel in three directions. First, the study sheds light on the need to more fully embrace relational practice when working with children who are grieving a loss, by reminding us of the matrix of relational elements at play for them. In principle this may be quite simple, but does require a lot of energy; it is about truly caring. Moules et al. (2007) offer that in “the face of the overwhelming, consuming, and complex nature of grief ... it may not help to develop a practice that is equally complex. Perhaps it is about understanding the complexity of grief alongside an appreciation for the simple things that can be comforting when all else is overwhelming” (p. 130). Second, we as practitioners are in fact participants in that relational matrix, and must take more responsibility for the role our own ways of relating have on helping relationships. How support is provided “cannot be strategized; it can only be offered in the spirit of curiosity, wondering, and creativity, and with the belief that what will be a fit is determined not by the [practitioner] but by the structure of the person” (Moules, 1998, p. 150). Third, narrative approaches contribute to more complete understandings of how we provide that support, and new possibilities in doing so.

*

It's late. I shut down my computer and turn out the light as I leave the room and make my way to bed. It's time to call it a night, but I know there will be much more learning to come. Somehow for me, this is a beginning, not an ending.

*

Concluding Thoughts

In this study, I engaged with very personal subject matter through multiple lenses. By so doing, I found myself constantly checking in with myself, my participants, and other sources to determine whether or not I was on the 'right' track. It seems that these are the very things that must occur to effectively engage in the field of this study as well. There is no formula to follow when one hopes to be of service to someone who has experienced a painful loss. It is a process that will unfold differently each time it happens. But to fully engage in that process – as with research – it is necessary to check in with oneself, the person who is seeking support, and all other sources of information relevant to that context.

By embracing such an approach when encountering children who are coping with loss, we can also move past those difficulties we face when attempting to effectively work cross-culturally. It alleviates the expectation that we should understand someone's process or experience before knowing that person. And it helps us avoid the dangers of essentializing cultural experiences (Hoskins, 2003). Rather, we can acknowledge that even when we are familiar with a particular cultural context – even if we are 'insiders' – we still have to take the time to establish relationships and build personal connections in order to even begin to understand the experience of someone else. As stated by Erica Burman (2004), "So who is different? Well, we all are. No one is a norm, since a norm (of the kind that inhabits our models) is a statistical abstraction with no reference to any concrete material entity" (p. 294).

Thus, regardless of whether we are aiming to support someone with whom we share many contextual realities, or someone who we tend to see as 'other', it is crucial that we engage in this process fully. We need as much energy, as much compassion, openness, and intention to truly hear their unique ways of making meaning, regardless of what we may or may not have in common, and cannot assume that shared experiences means shared meanings. As Hoskins says (1999), "Meanings can only be understood by deeply listening to individuals describe their relationship to various cultural discourses. This process requires a special kind of relationship between individuals; it requires a way of being culturally attuned" (p. 77). Therefore, future cross-cultural research that explores children's processes of making meaning of loss would be of great value.

Moreover, while the learning that has been generated within this study may help conversations about children's experiences with loss move in directions that are more holistic, it is not enough. Further research in which not only adult interpretations of childhood loss, but also children's current experiences are explored, would be a valuable next step to this dialogue.

While conducting this research, I have found myself wanting to interview more people, ask more questions, and consider my participants' accounts through more perspectives. Further exploration within various contexts, over time, and through a wider variety of theoretical frameworks could only serve to enhance understandings of how to best support children experiencing loss. In addition, continuing to explore reflexivity and research, as well as practical implications of research itself, will help to develop a deeper understanding of the relational matrix within which research occurs.

Appendix A

Timeline of Childhood Events and Losses for Cathy, Harvey, and Roy

- 25 September, 1944: Catherine (Cathy) is born (Fifth child).
28 September, 1945: Harvey is born (Sixth child).
5 September, 1947: LeRoy (Roy) is born (Seventh child).
15 July 1953: W_____ Junior is born (Eighth child).
1953: Maternal grandmother dies in family home, Stone's Cove, Newfoundland
August, 1955: Family moves to Grand Bank.
15 September, 1955: W_____ is born (Ninth child).
3 November, 1955: Schooner Mabel Dorothy is lost at sea (Father aboard).
12 November, 1955: Part of the wreckage of the Mabel Dorothy is located. No survivors found.
November, 1955: Mother is admitted to hospital.
Late November, 1955: N_____, Catherine, Harvey, Roy, Junior & W_____ move to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to live with father's sisters and their older sister, B_____.
January, 1956: Mother dies of stomach cancer in St. John's, Newfoundland.
January, 1957: Sister, B_____, dies of lung cancer in Halifax, Nova Scotia.
March, 1957: Aunt, N_____, dies during kidney surgery in Halifax, Nova Scotia.
1957: W_____ is adopted, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.
May, 1957: Roy moves to St. John's, Newfoundland, with sister, V_____.
July, 1960: Cathy moves to Chapel Arm, Newfoundland, with sister, V_____.
1964: Paternal grandfather, age 91 years, dies from bowel problems, Grand Bank, Newfoundland.
1966: W_____ Junior is adopted by cousin J_____; legally changes name to K_____.

Appendix B

Interview Guide

INTERVIEW ONE:

How is the experience of childhood loss interpreted over time?

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Considerations
<p>How do they currently interpret their experiences of childhood loss?</p>	<p>First, let's do a timeline...</p> <p>Knowing that this interview is approaching, I'm sure you've been at times thinking about the multiple losses you experienced as a child: Your mother, your father, your sister, as well as moving from your family home and all your other relatives. What stands out for you as most significant when you recall that time in your life?</p> <p>(Seek as much detail as possible, to provide a full picture that might include: where they were, who was around them, what their daily lives consisted of, how they felt, what they understood, what they didn't understand, how they responded, how others responded to them, what life was like at that time, and where their losses fit within it.)</p>	<p>How the story relates to cultural contexts</p> <p>How it relates to historical contexts</p> <p>How it relates to family contexts</p> <p>Significance of developmental level</p> <p>Details that seem significant</p> <p>Details that are not included</p> <p>How the story is told – the meanings, the mood, the perspective, and the time frame. How is the story framed?</p> <p>Metaphors and word choice</p> <p>Changes over time (Which of the above details change as well? Which did not?)</p> <p>Collective (family) story? (How might their stories</p>

<p>How may those interpretations have shifted over time?</p>	<p>Think for a moment about yourself at 30. Recall where you lived, what your life involved. If I had asked you the same questions at that point, what do you think you would have responded with?</p> <p>Ask this question again, bringing them back to their 20 year old selves.</p> <p>Then ask it again, at the age they were in 1955.</p> <p>(Ask questions that might lead to more contextual details – the same kind of detailed questions as last time, to once again have a full picture of life at that time and where their losses fit within it.)</p>	<p>inform each other's?)</p> <p>Individual story? (How might they differ?)</p> <p>What discourses do they engage in? (Does gender play a role?)</p> <p>Where are these discourses reflected around them?</p> <p>What presuppositions are embedded within their answers?</p> <p>What presuppositions are embedded within my questions?</p> <p>Again, consider all of the above factors, and try to get as much detail as possible</p>
<p>How do they perceive those shifts?</p>	<p>As you think about the differences in your experiences of these losses throughout your own life, what do you think contributed to those changes?</p> <p>(Do they view them as a progression? As a move towards 'better' ways of feeling about their losses, as a move towards 'resolution'? A regression? Is it more or less real? Do they think about it more or less? Intellectualize it? Do they see their grief as over, continuous,</p>	

	transformed? Do they see this as a response to the world around them, or due to their own will to change or both?)	
--	--	--

INTERVIEW TWO:

Reflecting on Interview One together: The experience of the interview as a new player on the relational matrix.

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Considerations
<p>How does even engaging in conversation about past events impact a person's current lived experience?</p>	<p>During the time that has passed since our last interview, has anything come to mind for you that you would like to add, alter, or re-address?</p> <p>(Ask questions that will elicit as much detail as possible about how the interview may have contributed to this change in perspective. What was their train of thought? How did they come to realize this change had occurred? What did they do during that time – look at photo albums, have conversations, or anything else in preparation?)</p>	<p>The fact that we are related to each other</p> <p>My previous knowledge shaping the details they included or excluded</p> <p>Fear of offending</p> <p>How did this present change in context influence the sense of self, and a past (?) experience?</p> <p>Is the influence (of context and self upon each other) uni-, bi-, or multi-directional – in their perception? In my perception?</p> <p>What discourses are being used? What meaning lies within them?</p> <p>Is there consistency between explicit and implicit messages?</p>
<p>How do thoughts manifest themselves in action? How does the meaning we give</p>	<p>When I invited you to participate in these</p>	

<p>something impact our lived experiences in ways that feel real?</p>	<p>interviews, what was your initial reaction? What did this request mean to you, if anything?</p> <p>(What process took place for them? Was it welcome? Was it new? Was it a favour to me? Did they talk about it with other participants or other family members?)</p>	<p>Implications of this for practice</p> <p>What changes occurred over time for them?</p> <p>How did the change occur?</p> <p>What 'real' effects have their reflections, thoughts, emotional experiences, the interview, or other contextual elements had on their lives?</p>
<p>What is the extension of the way they are experiencing these changes?</p>	<p>When you look forward to the Mariner's Memorial Reunion this summer, what meaning does it hold for you? Has this changed over time? If so, how?</p> <p>(Again, ask details about changes in context, situation, time, relationships, meaning, other family members, and conversations.)</p> <p>Given your life experiences, what is your philosophy of grief. What is grief?</p>	<p>Do they articulate these as positive or negative changes?</p> <p>Do they see them as stemming from context, contributing to context, or both? Stemming from self, contributing to self, or both?</p>

References

- Ainsworth, M. (1978). Bowlby-Ainsworth attachment theory: Open peer commentary. *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 1(3), 436-438.
- Ayyash-Abdo, H. (2001). Childhood bereavement: What school psychologists need to know. *School Psychology International*, 22(4), 417-433.
- Bergman, B. (1997). 500 years and counting. *Maclean's*, 110(27), 26-29.
- Berikoff, A. (2006). Inside memory: A story of living in the past and present of a social and cultural movement. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12, (5), 886-907.
- Bernard, H. R. (2000). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Bisset, A. (2002). *The Canadian Oxford compact dictionary*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.
- Bochner, A. (2000). Criteria against ourselves. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(2), 266-272.
- Bonanno, G. (2001). The crucial importance of empirical evidence in the development of bereavement theory. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127(4), 561-564.
- Bonanno, G.; Papa, A.; Lalande, K.; Zhang, N.; and Noll, J. (2005). Grief processing and deliberate grief avoidance: A prospective comparison of bereaved spouses and parents in the United States and the People's Republic of China. *Journal of Counselling and Clinical Psychology*, 73(1), 86-98.
- Bruner, J. (2004). Life as Narrative. *Social Research*, 71(3), 691-710.
- Burman, E. (2004). From difference to intersectionality: Challenges and resources. *European Journal of Psychotherapy, counselling, and health*, 6(4), 293-308.
- Clements, P. (1999). Autobiographical research and the emergence of the fictive voice. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 29(1), 21-32.
- Cohen, J. & Mannarino, A. (2004). Treatment of childhood traumatic grief. *Journal of Clinical and Adolescent Psychology*, 33(4), 819-831.
- Conrad, M. (2002). Mistaken Identities? Newfoundland and Labrador in the Atlantic Region. *Newfoundland Studies*, 18(2), 159-176.

- Cortazzi, M.; Jin, L.; Wall, D.; & Cavendish, S. (2001). Sharing learning through narrative communication. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 36(suppl), 252-257.
- Craig, G.; Kermis, M.; and Digdon, N. (2002). *Children Today, 2nd Ed.* Toronto, ON: Pearson Education Canada, Inc.
- Dalai Lama, His Holiness The. (1999). *Ethics for the new millennium.* New York, NY: Riverhead Books.
- Eberle, S. G. (2005). Memory and mourning: An exhibit history. *Death Studies*, 29, 535-557.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change.* Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.
- Fewster, G. (1990). *Being in Child Care: A journey into self.* Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press, Inc.
- Fewster, G. (2002). Growing together: the personal relationship in Child and Youth Care. *Journal of Child and Youth Care*, 15(4), 5-16.
- Fewster, G. (2006). Going there from being here. *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, 19(4), 64-65.
- Field, N.; Gao, B.; & Paderna, L. (2005). Continuing bonds in bereavement: An attachment theory based perspective. *Death Studies*, 29, 277-299.
- Garfat, T. (Ed.). (2003). *A Child and Youth Care approach to working with families.* Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press, Inc.
- Gendlin, E. (1981). *Focusing.* New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Gergen, K. (1998). *When relationships generate realities: Therapeutic communication reconsidered.* Unpublished document. Draft of chapter of forthcoming edited volume by Eero Riikonen. Retrieved 22 January, 2007 from <http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/kgergen1/web/page.phtml?id=manu6&st=manuscripts&hf=1>
- Gergen, K. (1999). *An invitation to social construction.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Gergen, K. (2001). *Transpositional hermeneutic.* Unpublished document. Paper presented at the International Society for Theoretical Psychology meetings, Calgary, Canada, June, 2001. Retrieved 22 January, 2007 from:

<http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/kgergen1/web/page.phtml?id=manu24&st=manuscript>

- Goldberg, T. (2001). Becoming a problematic consumer of narcotics. *Substance Use and Misuse*, 36(9&10), 1297 – 1322.
- Greenbank, P. (2003). The role of values in educational research: The case for reflexivity. *British Educational Research Journal*, 29(6), 791-801.
- Greene, S. & Hogan, D. (Eds.). (2005). *Researching children's experience: Approaches and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Gregory, D. (2004). Vernacular song, cultural identity, and nationalism in Newfoundland, 1920-1955. *History of intellectual culture*, 4(1), 1-22.
- Gubrium, J. & Holstein, J. (1998). Narrative practice and the coherence of personal stories. *Sociological Quarterly*, 39(1), 163-187.
- Hansen, H. (2006). The ethnonarrative approach. *Human Relations*, 59(8), 1049-1075.
- Hertz, R. (1997). *Reflexivity and voice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hoskins, M. (1999). Worlds apart and lives together: Developing cultural attunement. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 28(2), 73-85.
- Hoskins, M. (2003). What unites us, what divides us? A multicultural agenda within Child and Youth Care. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 32(6), 319-336.
- Hoskins, M. & Stoltz, J. (2005). Fear of offending: Disclosing researcher discomfort when engaging in analysis. *Qualitative Research*, 5(1), 95-111.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. New York, NY: Hyperion.
- Kamarck Minnich, E. (2005). *Transforming Knowledge, Second edition*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Knowlden, V. & Hopkins Kavanagh, K. (2004). An Introduction: Caring and culture in interpretation and practice. In Hopkins Kavanagh, K. & Knowlden, V. (Eds.). *Many voices: Toward caring culture in healthcare and healing*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Krueger, M. (1994). Framing child and youth care in moments of rhythm, presence, meaning, and atmosphere. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 23(4), 223-229.

- Krueger, M. (1997). Using self, story, and intuition to understand child and youth care work. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 26(3), 153-161.
- Krueger, M. (2000). Dance. *Journal of Child and Youth Care*, 13(4), 1-6.
- Kubler-Ross, E. (1983). *On children and death: How children and their parents can and do cope with death*. New York: NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- MacPhail, W. (1990). Stone's Cove. In G. Dion (Ed.). *Weave and Spin*. Hamilton, ON: Mini Mocho Press.
- MacPhail, W. (1992). *Abandon hope Mabel Dorothy*. Unpublished document. Performed in St. John's, NL: Theatre Newfoundland and Labrador, and Hamilton, ON: Theatre Aquarius.
- Mahoney, M. (2003). *Constructive Psychotherapy*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press, Inc.
- Maier, H. (1979). The core of care: Essential ingredients for the development of children at home and away from home. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 8(3), 161-173.
- McKendry, V. (2003). *Repatriating Plato's bones: Using performance to move beyond debate and toward a more democratic public sphere*. Brantford, ON: Unpublished document.
- Moules, N. (1998). Legitimizing grief: Challenging beliefs that constrain. *Journal of Family Nursing*, 4(2), 142-166.
- Moules, N.; Simonson, K.; Fleiszer, A.; Prins, M.; & Glasgow, B. (2007). The soul of sorrow work: Grief and therapeutic interventions with families. *Journal of Family Nursing*, 13(1), 117-141.
- Murray, J. (2001). Loss as a universal concept: A review of the literature to identify common aspects of loss in diverse situations. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 6, 219-241.
- Neimeyer, R. (2005). Complicated grief and the quest for meaning: A constructivist contribution. *OMEGA*, 52(1), 37-52.

- Newman, F. (1993). *Children in crisis: Support for teachers and parents*. Toronto, ON: Scholastic Canada, Inc.
- Peavy, V. (2004). *SocioDynamic Counselling: A practical approach to meaning making*. Chagrin Falls, Ohio: Taos Institute.
- Ramberg, B. (2005). *The philosophical encyclopedia*. Retrieved 15 January, 2007 from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/#Hermeneutic>. Stanford University: Metaphysics Research Lab, CSLI.
- Reid, M. (2005). Memory as initial experiencing of the past. *Philosophical Psychology*, 18(6), 671-698.
- Richardson, K. (2006). Focus on family for success. *Profiles of Success: Investigating Concepts of Success. Maritime Edition*, p. 4-8.
- Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Rompkey, R. (2006). *Literature and identity: Essays on Newfoundland and Labrador*. St. John's, NL: DRC Publishing.
- S.A.F.E.R. Counselling Service. (n.d.). *Helping children grieve: When little hearts are hurting*. Vancouver/Richmond Health Board.
- Saldinger, A.; Porterfield, K.; & Cain, A. (2004). Meeting the needs of parentally bereaved children: A framework for child-centered parenting. *Psychiatry*, 67(4), 331-352.
- Savicki, V. (1993). Clarification of Child and Youth Care identity through an analysis of work environment and burnout. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 22(6), 441 – 457.
- Silverman, D. (2005). *Doing qualitative research, 2nd Ed.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Somerville, M. (2004). Tracing bodylines: The body in feminist poststructural research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 17(1), 47-63.
- Steeves, R. (2002). The rhythms of bereavement. *Family and Community Health*, 25(1), 1-10.
- Sterelny, K. (2006). The evolution and evolvability of culture. *Mind and Language*, 21(2), 137-165.

- Stroebe, M.; Gergen, M.; Gergen, K.; & Stroebe, W. (1992). Broken hearts or broken bonds: Love and death in historical perspective. *American Psychologist*, (47), 10, 1205-1212.
- Taylor, C. (2004). Underpinning knowledge for child care practice: Reconsidering child development theory. *Child and Family Social Work*, 9, 225-235.
- Thich Nhat Hanh. (1991). *Peace is every step: The path of mindfulness in everyday life*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books, Ltd.
- Wainryb, C. (2004). The study of diversity in human development: Culture, urgencies, and perils. *Human Development*, 47, 131-137.
- Wangoola, P. (2006). The indigenous child: The Afrikan philosophical and spiritual basis of honoring children. In R. Cavoukian and S. Olfman (Eds.). *Child honoring: How to turn this world around*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.
- Wikipedia. (2007). The Ode to Newfoundland. Retrieved 15 March, 2007 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ode_to_newfoundland. *Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.*
- Yasien-Esmael, H. & Shimshon Rubin, S. (2005). The meaning structures of Muslim bereavements in Israel: Religious traditions, mourning practices, and human experience. *Death Studies*, 29, 495-518.

