

"An Exploration of the Experience of
Reminiscence Conversations in the Presence of a
Grandchild"

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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that reminiscence, done in a meaningful social context, may invite the reminiscer to construct stories that are empowering and validating. With no other apparent research existing that explores the effect of creating a self narrative in the context of a meaningful family member, this study addressed the question: "What is the experience of creating a self-narrative in the presence of a grandchild?". An interpretive phenomenological methodology was employed to explore this research question. Four grandparents, each with one chosen grandchild, participated in this study. Data gathering involved two reminiscence conversations involving each grandparent/grandchild pair and myself followed by an interview between myself and each grandparent in which their experience of the reminiscence conversations was discussed. Themes in each grandparent's experience of the reminiscence conversations were identified and explored and then some of the shared ways the participants experienced the conversations was discussed.

All the grandparent participants expressed a clear positive bias in the content and style of the self-narratives. This was due to the pleasure that was reported to come from telling positively oriented stories and the social belief that their grandchild would not want to hear painful memories. Unhappy life events were de-emphasised although important losses and regrets were acknowledged by all participants. While most found the opportunity to acknowledge these

events empowering, only one participant actively used the conversations to help resolve his regrets in a way similar to a therapeutic 'life review'. Of primary concern to this study was the question of the effect of the grandchild on the way the conversations were experienced. The participants indicated that their grandchildren promoted an emphasis on positive stories. The participants also shaped the conversations to engage and interest their grandchildren. To varying degrees, the grandchildren also revealed their roles as co-authors of their grandparents' narratives. The caring nature of the chosen listeners helped their grandparents to reconstruct parts of their narratives in a positive way. Finally, the grandchildren also enabled the participants to express the culturally defined grandparent role of the 'valued elder'. Implications for counsellors and further research was discussed in relation to the findings of this inquiry.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

An experience, especially in youth, is quickly overlaid by others, and is not at the moment fully comprehended. But it is overlaid, not lost. Time hurries it from us, but also keeps it in store, and it can later be recaptured and amplified by memory so that at leisure we can interpret its meaning and enjoy its savour.

John Buchan, 1940

A significant increase in the number and proportion of the aged within the general population is a demographic trend currently shared by all modern western societies (Hall and Perlmutter, 1992). With the tremendous growth in the aged population, interest in ways that can enhance this group's psychological well-being are flourishing and previously held beliefs concerning the aged are being vigorously reworked and reexamined. This general trend in gerontology is clearly reflected by the increased interest in life review and reminiscence therapy (Haight, 1991). Before the 1960's, the act of reminiscence by the aged was considered to be a sign of deterioration, a disengaging from the "real world" of the present to the "good old days" of the past. Over the last thirty years, however, theorists and researchers have re-examined their assumptions concerning reminiscence and now generally view the activity as a normal, if not essential, component of successful aging (Coleman, 1986). This reversal in attitude is partially due to the seminal work of Robert Butler (1963) who persuasively argued that life review (an evaluative form of reminiscence) is a universally practised and therapeutic activity. Since Butler's article, the number

of studies investigating the therapeutic potential of reminiscence has increased dramatically. Barbara Haight (1991) conducted the most recent literature review on the topics of reminiscence and life review for refereed journals in the United States. She found that gerontologists in the 1960's published only three articles on the subject, growing to twenty articles in the 1970's and finally increasing to seventy-one articles in the 1980's. Judging by the large number of articles published in the early 1990's, this expansionary trend is continuing. Even with this impressive growth in research on the use of reminiscence in the aged there are still many doubts concerning the activity's therapeutic efficacy.

Reminiscence Therapy and Life Review

One common problem in current gerontological literature is that the terms reminiscence therapy and life review are not well defined and are often used interchangeably (Ebersole, 1986; Watt and Wong, 1992). For the purposes of this inquiry, reminiscence therapy is defined as a procedure in which an aged individual uses their reminiscences alone, with a counsellor, or in a group, to help them adapt to the challenges of later life. Reminiscence therapy may have many functions and is not always focused on finding meaning in life. It could be directed towards other functions such as problem solving, social network building or self-esteem enhancement. Moreover, reminiscence therapy often does not involve a deep chronological exploration of an individual's life. Instead, props or themes may be used to focus and contain the reminiscer's memories.

Conversely, Robert Butler (1964) first described the life review process as "a naturally occurring, universal mental process" which involves a return to consciousness of past experiences and especially unresolved conflicts. According to Butler, life review is triggered by the approach of one's death and the need to come to terms with the past in an attempt to achieve what Erik Erikson called "ego integrity". Life review is a frank, evaluative and often lengthy process in which idealized images of the self are let go so that a new self can emerge - one that integrates, and is consistent with, the realities of the past, present and future.

Part of the reason why researchers have often used the terms reminiscence therapy and life review interchangeably has to do with the fact that many reminiscence interventions do not clearly fit the criteria of reminiscence therapy or life review. As I will discuss later in this text, the intervention used in this study is designed to elicit narrative life stories which may or may not be evaluative and may or may not be used to resolve past conflicts or find meaning in life. Because I have not designed the reminiscence intervention used in this study to fulfil the functions of life review, I have referred to the intervention as reminiscence therapy, or more accurately, reminiscence conversations.

Statement of the Problem

The experimental evaluations of reminiscence therapy with the elderly to date can be divided into those studies that examine life review and reminiscence therapy in group settings and those that focus on individual reminiscence interviews.

The results of the studies based on group reminiscence have almost always shown reminiscence to be related to positive adjustment in old age while the studies on individual reminiscence work have produced mixed results (Lieberman & Falk, 1971; Haight, 1991; Thornton & Brotchie, 1987). The equivocal findings in individual reminiscence therapy have led some researchers to claim that the role of reminiscence as a therapeutic activity is in doubt and that other means of therapy should be considered before resorting to reminiscence work (Thornton and Brotchie, 1987, Brennan & Steinberg, 1984). Taken as a whole, however, (with the inclusion of case studies and qualitative inquiries) the research on individual reminiscence therapy suggests that it would be unwise and perhaps even negligent to abandon the use of reminiscence as a potentially therapeutic intervention (Haight, 1991).

The confusing and ambivalent results of much of the research on reminiscence therapy has led Coleman (1986) to argue that simply asking if reminiscence promotes adjustment is too naive. Instead, Coleman says, "we must determine the conditions under which reminiscence is adaptive and relate such findings to our understanding of the human personality" (p. 152). To achieve Coleman's goal, it is this researcher's opinion that we must step back from trying to discover what problems reminiscence therapy will solve, and instead, richly describe actual experiences of reminiscing to discover more about what is actually taking place during this process. The mixed results of individual reminiscence studies may well indicate that reminiscence is a far more complex process than once thought. Reminiscence may, in fact, have multiple meanings and functions that vary dramatically depending on the individual and their contextual situation. This study was

created in response to this need for more descriptive and richly detailed studies of the phenomenon of reminiscence as expressed in a particular social context.

Although research suggests that group reminiscence therapy appears to promote adaptation in the elderly (Haight, 1991), quite often groups are not available or accessible to elderly clients and, in general, the aged have been found to be more apprehensive about group work than the younger population (Toseland, 1990). As of yet, there has been very little research devoted to identifying what, if any, aspects of the group reminiscence experience are therapeutic but lacking in the individual reminiscence therapy experience. With the impressive body of research indicating that group reminiscence therapy can facilitate late life adaptation it becomes imperative that the effective elements of group reminiscence be gleaned and applied in other more accessible, inviting and constructive ways.

One attempt to explain the discrepancy in research findings between group and individual reminiscence studies points to the longer duration of most group treatments (Haight, 1991). Another explanation is that many therapeutic qualities of reminiscence may be more easily expressed and experienced in a social context other than that of a client and therapist. Edward Casey (1989, cited in Sherman, 1990) noted that one of the most distinguishing characteristics of reminiscence is that it "flourishes in the company of others" (p. 8). He claims that not only does reminiscence tend to occur in a social context but it is "actively solicited" by that context. It has further been suggested that reminiscence, done in a social context of people who are important to the reminiscer, invites that individual to choose

and construct memories and stories that are reinforcing, educational and empowering and thus validate their life experience (McMahon & Rhudick, 1964).

Purpose of the Study

In this study, a grandchild has been added to the social context of a grandparent (reminiscer) and researcher creating a triad and making the conditions more akin to that of a group experience. A descriptive phenomenological methodology was used to explore the aged participants' experience of reminiscence therapy in this social context. It is my belief that this enquiry reveals a rich and detailed description of each participant's experience of exploring and describing the events and stories of their life in the presence of one of their grandchildren. This research explores and helps determine some of the ways the grandchild/grandparent social context affects reminiscence and whether such a setting promotes effective reminiscence therapy. Moreover, the research adds to the growing body of more recent literature that calls for a teasing out of the specific elements of reminiscence that can aid the elderly in adjusting to the challenges of later life.

Reminiscence and the Self

One of the underpinnings of phenomenology is the notion that, as people, we can only perceive and experience things (such as past events) with reference to ourselves (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, cited in Sherman, 1991). Thus a reminiscer's present notion of self cannot be fully separated from the

content or process of their memories. In essence then, each time we reminisce we reconstruct a component of our past in relation to our current selves.

The nature of reminiscence may also be influenced by an individual's current sense of self. When a prevailing construction of self is threatened (during transitions like adolescence and late adulthood for instance) research suggests that the level of reminiscence is high (Sherman, 1991; Lewis, 1971). Lewis (1971) conducted an experimental study which indicated that reminiscence is used by some elderly individuals as a defense against threats to their sense of self worth. In late adulthood threats to one's identity and self worth through the loss of loved ones and important social, physical and psychological functions is commonplace. As Sherman explains,

In youth one is contemporaneously embedded in the social context of significant others and objects, but in old age this context of self must be recaptured, and sustained in the present through reminiscence (p. 7).

Reminiscence, it is suggested, may be used by aged individuals to compensate for the loss of identity maintaining relationships and events by supporting (through revisiting and reconstructing the past) their sense of self. Many threats to the self experienced by the aged (loss of a partner or a job) can be viewed as a change in that individual's social context. To some extent, even our immediate social contexts influence and shape our identities. We are probably, for instance, very different people when caught in traffic than we are during a meal with loved ones. This is not to say that individuals react to changing contexts by passively altering their self concepts. An individual "shapes and is shaped by their social

context" (Starr, 1992; p. 259). But our social context can influence the stories we tell about ourselves and the way we feel about ourselves in the present. Sherman (1991) and Casey (1989) depict the intimate connection between one's reminiscences and their concept of self by describing a "revivifying" function of reminiscence.

There is a momentary merging of the person's consciousness with what is remembered. This gives a sense of becoming at one with what is remembered (p. 31).

The cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner (1987) goes even further by suggesting that we actually "become the autobiographical narratives by which we tell about our lives" (p. 15). If a particular social context can influence how and what an individual actively chooses to recall and tell about himself; and if different remembered narrative stories can affect one's present self concept, then it appears quite likely that the social context of reminiscence therapy can influence and invite the client to reconstruct their past in a manner that potentially therapeutically affects their present.

Research discussed later in this text, suggests that certain contexts make particular styles of reminiscence more likely. As of yet no research has examined if the particular social context of reminiscence therapy can be structured in such a way as to make certain therapeutic styles and ways of experiencing reminiscence more probable. Through the exploration of the participants' experience of reminiscing in a social context that includes a grandchild some reminiscence themes have been identified that appear to be clearly linked to the social context of the activity.

Self Narratives

Past events cannot be changed but the narrative used to connect them can be.

Edward Sherman

Life review is considered by most individuals as a very personal process and research indicates that simple reminiscence therapy rarely induces life review with clients or research participants (Lieberman & Tobin, 1983; Sherman, 1991). The narrative component of life review, however, appears to be a common feature of reminiscence therapy - especially in a social setting. Edward Casey (1989) claims that "the very telling of one's reminiscences to others induces or encourages a storyline form" (p. 40). Polkinghorne (1988) sums up the basic features of a narrative:

The narrative attends to the temporal dimension of human existence and configures events into a unity. The events become meaningful in relation to the theme or point of the narrative (p. 67).

Certainly the vast majority of the reminiscence conversations which took place in this study were comprised of narrative story telling constructions. This narrative form is important because as Epson, White and Murray (1992) argue, "In order to give meaning to our experience we must organize it, frame it, or give pattern to it" (p. 97). These authors go on to say that "narrative provides the dominant frame for lived experience and the organization and patterning of lived experience" and "it is through these stories that lived experience is interpreted". Furthermore, there is no better "mechanism for the structuring of lived experience that so captures the sense of lived time". Self narratives then, are not only structures that enable us to find meaning in our lives and our selves but they also provide a notion of time

that reflects our lived experience of our lives to date, not the chronological duration of events.

Bruner (1987) argues that there is little to distinguish between the narrative processes we use to talk about our lives and who we are as individuals.

Eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very "events" of a life (p. 15).

Polkinghorne (1988) claims that because narratives provide a scheme for our self-identity, therapeutic functions of narrative could include making a latent narrative evident or constructing a unifying and coherent narrative that clarifies an individual's present self and future possibilities. He goes on to say that "narratives are context sensitive, both in their telling and in the meaning they give to events" (p.164). It appears likely then, that particular contexts may influence the therapeutic meaning making potential of narratives.

There is also evidence that a narrative form of reminiscence is particularly appropriate for the aged population. Recent empirical research indicates that the aged are less able than the young to remember expository text but just as able to recall text presented in a narrative form (Tun, 1989. cited in Sherman, 1991). As Sherman states, "For the elderly, perhaps more than any other age group, narrative is the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (p. 40). As will be described more fully, this study was designed to invite the aged participants to review their lives by constructing a self-narrative (through the act of recalling and recounting the stories of their lives) in an effort to explore the ways this process may be experienced.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED THEORY AND RESEARCH

Historical Background

To a large extent, the seeds of reminiscence therapy were planted by the psychoanalytic theorists Carl Jung and Erik Erikson. Jung (cited in Hall & Lindzey, 1985) focused primarily on the second half of human life and argued that human goals become more spiritual and focused on finding meaning in life, as individuals mature. Erikson also richly described late life as a time when individuals reflect on their lives and try to achieve "ego integrity" or the integration of the accrued experiences of one's life. Although these theorists stressed the importance of self-reflection in old age, the prevailing attitude toward reminiscence in the aged, until the mid 1960's, was extremely negative (Coleman, 1986; Sherman, 1991). The belief that reminiscence in the aged was a sign of disengagement and mental deterioration prevailed until 1963 when Robert Butler published his seminal article on the topics of life review and reminiscence titled "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged". In this article Butler describes the life review as,

A naturally occurring, universal mental process characterised by the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences, and, particularly the resurgence of unresolved conflicts (p. 66).

Butler argued convincingly that this process can help the aged attain Erikson's final developmental task of achieving ego integrity. The work of Butler offered a new perspective on the reminiscence process and serves, to this day, as a

catalyst and theoretical framework for research on individual and group reminiscence therapy. But while Butler helped "liberate" reminiscence, his individual developmental perspective of the phenomenon has been so influential it may have overshadowed other fruitful ways of viewing the activity. Another study carried out by McMahon and Rhudick (1964) followed shortly after Butler's seminal work but focused more on the interpersonal and social influences and functions of reminiscence. These researchers found that the frequency of story-telling and instructive reminiscence (which will later be called transmissive reminiscence) in a group of Spanish American war veterans was closely related to freedom from depression. They noted that the positive aspects of the past were often exaggerated by the veterans and that this tendency could be therapeutic in aiding in the preservation of self respect in the face of lost social roles and functions in old age. It seems that the social context of being with other veterans invited the reminiscers to positively embellish their stories and thus use the past to construct and support a positive present identity. Although McMahon and Rhudick's study is considered a classic, most research on reminiscence therapy has followed the intrapersonal developmentalist course set by Butler. One goal of this inquiry is to explore the influence of social factors on the experience of reminiscence and in so doing discern if the reminiscer's social context is of more importance than has been previously indicated in the predominantly intrapsychic developmental literature.

Individual and Group Reminiscence

A great deal of the writing on reminiscence therapy has been in the form of single client reports or case studies.

Haight (1991) reviewed sixty of these articles and found that, with one exception, they were all "quite positive about life review or at least, nonevaluative" (p. 5). There is a great discrepancy, however, between the overwhelmingly positive results of controlled research studies on group reminiscence therapy and the mixed results of equivalent individual one-to-one reminiscence studies.

Some of the quantitative individual reminiscence studies with positive results include research by Carlson (1984) who found that the level of reminiscing correlated with ego integrity. Similarly, Fallot (1980) found that reminiscing can serve an adaptive function of decreasing depression and shame in middle adulthood as well as old age. McMahon and Rhudick's (1964) often quoted work suggests that veterans who reminisced the most had the highest self-esteem. Haight (1988) found that life review significantly improved the level of life satisfaction and psychological well-being of her participants.

Conversely, however, Brennan & Stienburg (1984) found no relationship between reminiscence and morale in his aged participants. Lieberman & Falk (1971) found no difference in level of adaptation between reminiscers and non reminiscers. Finally, Thornton and Brotchie (1987) reviewed the empirical literature and concluded that "there is little evidence of an age-specific process of reminiscence" and "thus the function of such a process is unclear and the role of reminiscence as a therapeutic activity is in doubt" (p. 93).

In opposition to the equivocal results found in individual reminiscence research, controlled research with groups has almost always produced positive outcomes (Haight, 1991). These results include improved levels of self-esteem

(Bergland, 1982; Lappe, 1987; Ingersol & Goodman, 1980), decreased levels of depression (Parsons, 1986) and improved cognitive functioning and adaptability (Hughston & Merriam 1982; Berghorn & Schafer 1987). In fact, of the twenty-one group research studies reviewed by Haight, only one had negative results.

This discrepancy in research results is exemplified by the opposing results of two quantitative studies. In one study, by Perotta and Meachem (1981), the reminiscence therapy was done on an individual one-to-one basis; and in the other, by Lappe (1987), the therapy was done in a group setting. Both studies measured the change in the subject's level of self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale but only Beaton's group reminiscence study found significant positive results. This difference between the positive results of empirical group studies and the mixed results of individual one-on-one studies raises questions concerning Butler's conception of the life review. Why, if the life review is a universal psychodevelopmental process, as Butler claims, are the one-on-one reminiscence therapy sessions not more successful? Perhaps, as some authors claim (Sherman, 1991; Coleman, 1991), life review is not as frequently experienced (or publicly expressed) a process as once thought. It is this researcher's opinion that there are other more broadly experienced benefits from reminiscing in a more meaningful social context than that of a single, relatively unknown listener. Some important research has bypassed Butler's psychodevelopmental perspective and focused instead on the social contextual influences on reminiscence first illuminated by McMahon and Ruhdick.

The Social Context

The following are some research findings and commentary concerning how the social context in which reminiscence therapy takes place can significantly affect the activity's form and function. The early studies of Mchanon & Rhudick (1964) and Lewis (1971), in which the participants seemed to use reminiscence to fortify their "selves" in particular social contexts, have already been discussed. In a related study Lieberman and Falk (1970) found that subjects on a waiting list for admission to an old-age home reminisced more extensively than those residing in the more stable context of a permanent residence or home. The researchers suggested that an unstable social context could promote the use of reminiscence which may be used to provide a sense of continuity during transition. In Molinari and Reichland's (1984-85) review of the empirical literature on life review and reminiscence they suggest that reminiscence may be beneficial to community elders but not for institutionalised individuals because their environment (social context) "tends to reflect a failure of autonomy" (p. 23). Furthermore, David (1990) postulates that one reason for the mixed results in some reminiscence research "may be the failure to consider social variables shaping the content and context of the act of reminiscing" (p. 175). Although she states that the social factors of the interview situation itself are of considerable importance she focuses her study on the social influences on the subjects' current life. David ends her study by suggesting that it would be particularly interesting to explore the use of reminiscence as a means of social interaction or exchange.

There is also considerable theoretical support for the notion that the social context of reminiscence has an important influence on the nature and therapeutic potential of reminiscence therapy. Coleman (1986) reveals a negative social influence on reminiscence when he argues that many aged people may have adopted an attitude from society that their past memories are "irrelevant, uninteresting or of no further value" (p. 34) even though their lives may have been filled with interesting and worthwhile accomplishments. Coleman then argues that reminiscence in an accepting social context can reverse this negative attitude. He states that the act of being invited to share experiences with other individuals socially validates the reminiscence process and an individual's life story while enabling the reminiscer to rediscover the worthwhile life they may have had regardless of their present condition. The social context then, can validate the act of reminiscence, the individual's life story and perhaps the individual reminiscer herself.

Other researchers argue that, to some extent, the form and function of the life story itself depends on the social context in which it is constructed. Magee (1988) and Lewis (1971) both agree that, in certain social contexts the aged identify themselves with past occupational and social roles that help them to equal or supersede the person with whom they are interacting. Magee claims that older reminiscers achieve "role parity" with their audience when they recall and disclose their worthy roles and "time parity" when they reminisce back to the time they were the same age as the younger person with whom they are communicating. Magee explains that,

Reminiscence is not an objective, photographic

image of past events. It is more a creative reconstruction of events that accommodates memories to meet a person's current emotional needs (p. 24).

The nature of the reminiscence then, changes with the different needs of the reminiscer in different social contexts.

Butler & Lewis (1974) also acknowledge the potential therapeutic importance of social context in reminiscence therapy when they recommend intergenerational reminiscence group therapy in which the old "assume an active learning as well as teaching role" (p. 173). These authors claim that reminiscence groups made up of old, middle aged and young "are especially useful in decreasing the sense of isolation and uselessness felt by many elderly persons" (p. 172). More recently, Taft & Nehrke (1990) have suggested the use of family members or other younger participants (such as high school students or members of historical societies) in life review activities. Malde (1988) also advises that in a difficult life review situation "sharing with a special confidant in a person's life (eg. family member, friend, clergy)" may be important in dealing with the pain that may be generated in the process. Strangely, very little research has been done on the effect of intergenerational influence on reminiscence therapy even though researchers have suggested that such contexts could be beneficial.

Social Constructionists

The older I get
the better I was.

Unknown

McMahona and Rhudick's emphasis of the importance of

social factors in reminiscence is most clearly and effectively echoed by social constructionist researchers (Bruner, 1986; Cohler, 1982; Gergen, 1980; Lax, 1992; Starr, 1983; Tarman, 1991; Wallace, 1992) who directly challenge many of Butler's ideas on life review and reminiscence.

These authors dispute the established psychodevelopmental assumption that aging is a universal process of ordered changes and the psychoanalytic notion that life patterns are determined at an early period of life (Gergen, 1980). Citing recent research indicating that the experience of aging differs across settings and contexts, these researchers emphasize "how age and aging are actively defined and understood in specific situations" (Wallace, 1992. p. 120). The aged individual's identity is actively and socially defined because, as Lax (1992) states,

our sense of self arises not only through our discourse with others but 'is' our discourse with others. There is no hidden self to be interpreted. We reveal ourselves in every moment of interaction through the ongoing narrative that we maintain with others (p. 71).

From this perspective, reminiscencing by the aged is not an activity designed to meet a universal developmental challenge but an expression of an ongoing construction and reconstruction of identity that is unique to a particular time and context.

Wallace characteristically, views talk of the past in reminiscence therapy as a social activity not a natural response to an underlying psychological process. He states that because talk of the past is produced within social interaction, "life review therapy as currently practised, is best seen as a process of socially constructing life stories" (p. 124). In his study, many of Wallace's research partici-

pants had difficulty responding to the general request for their life story stating that they only talked about themselves when asked to do so by particular people in particular situations. Wallace concludes that older people do not naturally "break out" into life review; instead, their reminiscences are constructed in response to "narrative challenges" such as, Wallace states, when a grandchild asks a grandparent what life was like in the old days. In fact, many of Wallace's participants who were interviewed in the presence of a friend or relative found the task of relating their life story much easier. Wallace also bypasses Butler's psychodevelopmental explanation of the benefits of reminiscence therapy by emphasizing the social benefits:

By fulfilling cultural expectations and facilitating interaction with persons of different ages, self esteem may be enhanced by the recognition and fulfilment of age-appropriate narrative participation (p. 124).

Wallace concludes by suggesting that therapists might improve effectiveness by focusing on the social benefits of talking about the past.

Another social constructionist, Jerold Starr, argues that when reviewing her or his past, a person selects certain acts and construes them in such a way as to form a particular characterization that suites their current social context. Starr goes on to say that,

The content (and any changes in such) of an individual's attribution of motive to his/her former self must be interpreted in relation to his/her present situation, position and audience (p. 264).

For Starr, people are agents and not just objects in the world and thus people often deliberately change their environments which in turn changes the context and experience of aging

itself. Because the "individual both shapes and is shaped by the social context" (p. 259) they can actively influence who their audience/listeners are and thus the nature of their life story.

Cohler (1982) also departs from the individualistic developmental position by highlighting the importance of broad social influences on the function of reminiscence. He claims that the first two-thirds of life are represented by maturational transformations but the changes of later life are largely the result of social effects. From Cohler's position, the reminiscence process is a broad personal narrative that results from psychological and social influences and functions to provide a coherent, consistent rendition of an often inconsistent life course. Cohler notes that individuals interpret selected memories in consistent and coherent ways because the individual and society value this form of presentation. One can thus avoid psychological fragmentation and be understood and accepted by others. For Cohler then, the social context serves to shape an individual's life story into something of a narrative story that makes sense and is more satisfying to the individual and those around her. Cohler warns however, that unpredictable and dramatic transformations frequently take place in the life-span which "require considerable self-interpretive activity in order to preserve a sense of continuity in the personal narrative which fosters cohesiveness or congruence" (p. 215). According to Cohler, it is at these times of personal transformation that reminiscence is needed to integrate life changes into a cohesive narrative that makes sense to the reminiscer and those around him.

Marshall (1980) also takes issue with the dominant

developmental perspective and points to the influence of the social context on the form and function of reminiscence. He argues that human reality, including one's view of self, is socially constructed. That is, an individual's sense of self is seen as arising in interaction with others. Marshall goes on to state that,

there is evidence suggesting that those often alone, when reminiscing, view past events as not having been resolved favourably whereas individuals who are helped to reconstruct their life stories are more likely to come up with a good story (p. 73).

For Marshall then, one's life story and sense of self are closely connected with each other and the social context in which they are couched.

Lax (1990) uses literary metaphor to emphasise the importance of the listener in shaping one's life story. In discussing how individuals "co-construct" their life stories with others he states that "the client, in essence, does not have a single true story independent of a "reader" to whom she is telling the story" (p. 73). Lax believes that we "reinterpret and embellish our life history in the context of another, with history continually being recreated/constructed rather than remembered" (p. 74). For Lax, the individuals that make up the reminiscer's social context are "co-constructors" or "co-authors" of the story that is remembered and told. Marshall and Lax then, see the social setting of reminiscence as critical in the shaping the reminiscer's construction or reconstruction of their story and, Marshall would say, sense of self. Unfortunately, Marshall states, "this need for interaction late in life is often not available as a resource for validating one's view of self" (p. 267).

Tarman (1988) also focuses on the importance of social

context in explaining the function of the reminiscence and life review process in the elderly. She draws on Goffman's (1950) dramaturgical approach which emphasizes the importance of manipulating and managing the impressions one makes on others. Tarman suggests that older persons reconstruct their life stories in the presence of others who are important to them in order to maintain a positive identity, compensate for the negative social stigma of old age and thus maintain personal power in their relationships. In this case, the objective "truth" of the memories is irrelevant. What is important is that the reminiscer and the important individuals around him are impressed by the stories and the intrapersonal and interpersonal stature and value of the reminiscer is maintained. This goes beyond Cohler's notion of the importance of a coherent narrative that can be understood by others by adding the importance of the power and desirability of the story to offset the lower social prestige of the elderly. If Tarman's argument is sound it is easy to see how the nature of the memories an elderly client selects (and thus the nature of the reminiscence therapy) could be significantly influenced by the particular social context in which the therapy takes place.

As a group then, the social constructionists argue that aging does not occur in universally predictable stages but is a unique experience for everyone. It is an experience that is part of each individual's identity and is constantly being co-created, through social exchange, between an individual and her social environment. The objective truth of an individual's life story then, is of no consequence. What is important is how each co-constructed rendition influences the speaker. The social constructionists might well suggest that

the mixed results found in research testing the beneficial potential of reminiscence and life-review activities comes from the fact that most of the studies were based on faulty psychodevelopmental assumptions reflecting Butler's established perspective. Instead of testing to see if a certain form of reminiscence "works" in helping an aged individual to achieve a developmental goal it may be more beneficial to inquire about the conditions of the social context that help define the reminiscence experience. From this perspective, certain social contexts could be identified that increase the likelihood that reminiscers would co-construct life stories which beneficially effect them.

It is this author's belief that reminiscence by the aged is not only derived by culturally defined developmental needs but by social needs such as belonging and being valued by those in one's social network. Moreover, the immediate social context of reminiscence therapy (audience/listeners) can act as a co-author(s) of the reminiscer's life story by highlighting the social needs of the reminiscer and inviting the reminiscer to satisfy these needs through reminiscence.

Grandparenthood and Reminiscence Therapy

If the social context in which reminiscence and life review takes place has a profound influence on the process, as the previous research and writing suggests, then one may properly consider what type of social context is likely to influence reminiscence therapy in a constructive way. There is evidence that suggests that the grandparent/grandchild social context may be a constructive one for reminiscence therapy. In her article, "Grandparenthood, Life Review, and

Psychosocial Development" Kivnick (1988) argues that the experience of being a grandparent facilitates a usually unconscious reminiscence and life review process in which experiences from the past are used to aid the grandparent grandchild interaction. Kivnick delineates five dimensions of grandparenthood, three of which are particularly well suited for expression through reminiscence with grandchildren. These particularly relevant dimensions are: The Valued Elder - passing on tradition, history and advice; Immortality Through Clan - patriarchal or matriarchal responsibility and identification with grandchildren; and Reinvolvement with Personal Past - grandparents reexperiencing their own pasts through identifying with their grandchildren. Kivnick describes a reciprocal process where the life review is an opportunity to integrate the feelings of responsible nurturance, brought on by the meaningful role of the grandparent. Active grandparenting, in turn, stimulates further life review and psychological integration. Kivnick then, suggests that reviewing one's life and the expression of grandparent roles are well suited endeavours. Furthermore, as Kivnick (1982) discussed in a previous article,

grandparents enhance their mental health by using grandparenthood to maximize psychosocial and circumstantial strengths, to rework psychosocial deficits, and to compensate for circumstantial weaknesses (p. 65).

Clearly then, there is reason to believe that the life stories constructed by reminiscers are influenced by the immediate social context in which the reminiscing takes place. Moreover, an intergenerational social context, such as a grandparent and grandchild setting, may facilitate a therapeutic reminiscence experience for the aged reminiscer.

Types of Reminiscence

One factor frequently cited as a weakness in many controlled research studies on reminiscence therapy is the failure to specify the type(s) of reminiscence experienced by the participants (Watt & Wong 1991, LoGerfo 1981, Haight 1991). Many authors (Coleman 1974, 1986; Sherman 1990; McMahon & Rhudick 1964) have argued that different types of reminiscence have different adaptive functions. Watt & Wong (1991) argue against a "simplistic" approach to reminiscence and claim it would be more useful to "conceptualize reminiscence as a multi-dimensional construct, with each dimension serving a unique psychological function and bearing a different relationship with well-being" (p. 40). These authors completed an extensive study using content analysis to determine six distinctive types of reminiscing. These types include "integrative reminiscence", in which the subject achieves a sense of meaning, coherence and reconciliation with the past. "Instrumental reminiscence" involves using the lessons gained from past experiences to manage present difficulties. "Transmissive reminiscence" takes place when the subject instructs another individual about their cultural heritage and/or own morals and value system. "Narrative reminiscence" involves the act of relating accounts of the past for the purpose of biographical information. "Escapist reminiscence" occurs when a subject dwells in the past to escape difficulties in the present. Finally, "obsessive reminiscence" takes place when a subject is haunted or preoccupied with a traumatic past experience. Research by Watt (1986) has found that integrative, instrumental and transmissive types of reminiscence are positively correlated to well-being while the obsessive style is negatively related

to well-being. Mention should be made that Watt and Wong's category of narrative reminiscence is very restrictive and it is quite possible that reminiscences that would be classified under the other headings were told to the interviewer in a narrative story-like form.

Reminiscence researchers have concentrated most of their efforts on the integrative style of remembering. This is largely due to the importance of integrative reminiscence to Butler's popular conception of life review and the intrapersonal developmental course of research initiated by Butler's work. Relatively little research has been done on transmissive reminiscence even though Butler suggests that individuals have a deep need to leave a constructive legacy through teaching others their values, ideas and cultural heritage. Moreover, Jung (cited in Hall & Lindzey, 1989) claimed that the passing over of knowledge was a central focus of the second half of life. McMahon and Rhudick (1964) and Coleman (1975) have argued that the transmissive style of reminiscence can enhance the level of self-esteem in the elderly because it is a means of demonstrating one's wisdom and knowledge while performing an important role in society. Watt and Wong (1991) use, as an example of transmissive reminiscence, a grandparent telling a grandchild their life story while at the same time trying to instill in them the lessons and values that have been useful along the way. It would seem then, that reminiscence therapy in a social context which includes a grandchild as well as an interviewer may promote transmissive reminiscence and the therapeutic benefits that go along with this style of remembering.

Adolescent and Early Adult Grandchildren

Many elderly individuals between the ages of 65 and 75 have teenage or early adult grandchildren. All four of the grandchildren who participated in this inquiry were between twenty and twenty-five years of age. At first glance the developmental gulf between the two age groups seems like a potential problem. There is, however, evidence to suggest that the adolescent/early adult age group could be especially receptive to an activity involving the reminiscence process. There is empirical evidence that suggests that adolescents have the same frequency of reminiscence as the elderly (Cameron 1972; Giambra 1977 cited in Coleman 1986). The adolescents' reminiscences though, (shown in their conversations and proliferation of diaries) focus on the question of "who am I? and "who will I be?" as opposed to the elderly who reminisce partly to ask "who have I been"? (Sherman, 1991). Dirsch (1988) demonstrated, through the Brookdale Project, in which 103 adolescents performed life-review interviews with 447 aged individuals, that young people and the aged constitute a constructive context for reminiscence. Some of the project's goals were to give the elderly population a chance to tell their life stories; to enable the elderly to overcome loneliness, loss of connection and isolation through contact with the young; and to foster transmission of ethnic heritage and cultural legacies and help the elderly to use the life review process to resolve conflicts and integrate unassimilated life experience. Dirsch reported that most of the best information regarding the success of the procedure came from subjective reports, observations and anecdotes and much of these reports were very positive. Dirsch then, suggests that overall the project

achieved its goals which are very similar to the therapeutic benefits derived from integrative and transmissive reminiscence.

There is reason to believe, therefore, that adolescent and young adult grandchildren may make very engaged and interested participants in a reminiscence experience with the elderly; and the elderly, who are at the other end of adulthood, have much experience and wisdom to share.

This is not to say, however, that grandchildren who are older or younger than the adolescent/early adult age group were considered unacceptable participants in this inquiry. The most important criteria for the grandchildren participants was that they be considered important and meaningful people in the lives of their grandparent. For this reason the grandparent participants were given the freedom to choose the grandchild that they believed to be most appropriate for the reminiscence activity. As mentioned, all the grandchildren chosen were young adults and one participant explained her choice of grandchildren by stating that she wanted a partner who would be able to really listen to her. She went on to say that she believed most people are not really interested in the past or their family history until they reach their late teens or early twenties.

Summary of the Review of the Literature

Research suggests a clear difference in levels of therapeutic effectiveness between group and individual reminiscence therapy. Almost all the group reminiscence therapy research indicates that this social activity promotes adjustment in later life while the results from individual

reminiscence therapy studies are mixed (Haight, 1991). One explanation for this difference is that there is something in the social context of the group experience that enhances the therapeutic potential of reminiscence. The theoretical foundation for the notion that social contexts significantly influence the form and function of reminiscence is largely provided by social constructionists, a group of human scientists which include Bruner, 1987; Cohler, 1982; Wallace, 1992; Marshall, 1980; Lax, 1990; Starr, 1982; and Tarman, 1988. These authors argue that social forces can guide the way in which a reminiscer's life stories are constructed and used. They would further argue that the socially co-constructed stories can serve to strengthen the reminiscer's sense of self when other means of maintaining identity fail. Several experimental research studies seem to support these theoretical arguments by demonstrating various ways in which different social contexts experienced by subjects influence the nature and function of their reminiscence experience (McMahon & Rhudick 1964; David 1991; Leiberman & Falk 1970; Morlinari & Reichland 1985; Havinghurt & Glasser, 1972). Still other researchers have suggested some of the particular therapeutic functions of social reminiscence and some specific social contexts which may trigger and enhance these positive effects. These suggestions include: how social reminiscence can lead to an exaggeration of positive memories which could promote self-esteem in the face of lost social roles (McMahon & Rhudick, 1964); how shared life stories can socially validate these memories and thus the individual's identity and also lead to the rediscovery of worthwhile life accomplishments regardless of present conditions (Coleman, 1986); how intergenerational reminiscing can lead to active

learning and teaching roles in the elderly and how intergenerational family members can help the reminiscer through painful sections of life-review (Butler & Lewis, 1974; Malde, 1988); how reminiscence in the social context of a grandchild can facilitate the satisfying functions of grandparenthood which include passing on tradition, advice, family heritage and reinvent the grandparent's personal past (Kivnick, 1988).

Many of these beneficial effects may be issued by a type of reminiscence Watt and Wong (1991) call "transmissive reminiscence". This refers to when a reminiscer communicates his cultural heritage, traditions and value system to a listener or listeners. Prominent theorists such as Jung and Butler (1963), have argued for the importance of transmissive reminiscence and researchers like McMahon and Rhudick (1964) and Watt (1986) have demonstrated its therapeutic value. An aged individual reviewing their life with a grandchild has been described as an ideal context for transmissive reminiscence (Watt and Wong, 1991). Finally, the adolescent/young adult age group has been shown to be a potentially receptive and constructive age group to take part in reminiscence therapy with aged reminiscers.

The abundance of theoretical and experimental research indicating the therapeutic potential of reminiscence therapy carried out within a supportive social context has given rise to this inquiry. Furthermore, some of the research previously mentioned has suggested that a grandchild may be a particularly suitable part of this beneficial social context because of the identity and self esteem enhancing style of reminiscence he or she could elicit from a their grandparent reminiscer. These factors combined with the surprising lack

of research exploring the effect of an intergenerational social context on reminiscence therapy has lead to the development of this study. It is this researcher's opinion that this inquiry provides some important insights concerning the effect of this particular social context on the experience of reminiscence therapy. This information can then be used to improve the use of reminiscence therapy and better meet the increasing counselling needs of our aging population.

It is important to mention that the research previously reviewed points to possible ways that reminiscence therapy in the presence of a grandchild could be experienced and not expectations that this researcher brought to this inquiry. Theories concerning what is taking place in the reminiscence process will be grounded in the data generated by the study and not preconceived expectations.

CHAPTER 3
TACTICS OF INQUIRY
METHOD

Assumptions of the Phenomenological Approach

I have chosen an interpretive phenomenological methodology for this inquiry because I believe it will enable me to illuminate the depth and complexity of the participant's lived experience. At the same time, I have followed Lincon's (1992) call for "philosophic and pragmatic flexibility" (p. 384) when investigating a research problem. Hence I have shaped this methodology to best suite the nature of the research and my own belief system.

The general characteristics of the methodology used in this inquiry include the following:

1. The relationship between the researcher and participants is dialogical (Van Manen, 1990). Although the goal of this relationship is to describe the participants' experience as accurately as possible, the researcher is always active in stimulating and influencing the participants' experience. In this sense, the participants and researcher were co-constituents in that we created the world in which this inquiry took place.

2. All aspects of this research were based on the assumption that the relationship between the participants and the researcher is non hierarchical. In this study I entered a dialogical relationship with the participants in which everyone contributed information of equal value. If we view reality as a human creation and not nature's creation then there can be no special warrant for expert knowledge (Nielsen, 1990 cited in Hartrick, 1994). Each participant was informed

that he or she would be considered an authority on issues concerning their life and self. Furthermore, I tried to reinforce this authority through member checks and by showing my appreciation through encouraging remarks whenever a participant made a statement or revelation that appeared to be significant to them.

3. It must also be acknowledged that experience is contextual, structured and can be "pre-reflective" and "reflective" (Smith, 1985). Every experience is bound to a specific context and is therefore unique. There are, however, common structures around which these unique experiences revolve and it is these underlying structures that phenomenological research aims to uncover. There is also a distinction between reflective and pre-reflective experience. Pre-reflective experience refers to direct, immediate, experience of a phenomenon (Smith, 1985). Reflective experience acknowledges that it is impossible to remember and describe an experience exactly as it was first experienced. In many ways I have asked my participants to remember and describe a past experience of remembering and describing and so it is clearly reflective experience that is the focus of this study.

4. The fact that the researcher's experiences and influence are always present in this inquiry forces the researcher to re-examine the goal of objectivity and the nature of subjectivity. For the purposes of this phenomenological method, "objectivity" is defined as "fidelity to phenomena" (Colaizzi, 1978). This essentially means that the researcher must recognize and "bracket" his or her assumptions about the phenomena. Objectivity in this sense requires the researcher to acknowledge his own

experience as well as the participants'. In order to acknowledge the influence of my own experience in this process I have made a rigorous effort to define my personal assumptions, feelings and experiences in topics related to this study and bracket them in a manner discussed below. Subjectivity in human inquiry refers to the process of being "perceptive, insightful and discerning" in order to capture the full depth and richness of the object (van Manen, 1990). Hartrick (1994) likens this process to that of empathic understanding in that the researcher must be aware of her own beliefs and assumptions in order to fully understand the meaning behind the participants' experiences.

Bracketing

The very fact that I have chosen to explore the experience of reminiscence in a grandparent/grandchild context indicates my interest in this subject area. This interest, in turn, is accompanied by a host of beliefs and assumptions about the nature and importance of the topic and related issues. Other preconceptions were then added to my original assumptions through reviewing the relevant literature on the subject area. One extremely important aspect of my research then, was becoming aware of and 'bracketing' my preexisting knowledge and assumptions about the issues pertaining to my research. This is particularly critical in phenomenological inquiry because in phenomenological inquiry we must rely on ourselves as the primary research tool (Patton, 1990).

Hartrick (1994) points out that there are two conflicting views in regards to what bracketing is and how it is undertaken. One group of researchers (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi,

1970) believe that the researcher must identify and suspend all prejudgments before the essential qualities of a phenomena can be explored. The second group, which includes van Manen (1990), believe that the suspension of presuppositions is impossible and instead, the researcher must become conscious of these presuppositions and in so doing expose their shallow or concealing character (van Manen, 1990). In effect the researcher acknowledges his/her preconceptions and recognizes them as other than objective truth. This enables the researcher to control the influence they have on the process of describing and analyzing the phenomena.

In this inquiry I viewed the issue of bracketing from the second perspective. Through the process of journal writing and analysis, I have become more conscious of the ways my life-history has informed me on the issues pertinent to this inquiry. Some of the most useful insights and assumptions I discovered include the following.

1. I began with a view of the self as a singular, relatively stable entity. I now view the self as dynamic, complex and multi-layered.

2. Human beings make meaning out of the world in relation to the context that surrounds them. The immediate social context, as well as the broad cultural context, has a significant influence on the way an individual perceives themselves and their world. The social context of this study then, will have some influence on the participants' experience.

3. Human beings communicate extensively using the narrative form and this structure is also the primary form in which people understand and make meaning of their lives and their worlds.

4. There are many different types and functions of reminiscence. Reminiscence has too long been conceived as a stable singular activity that serves few meaningful functions. I believe there are a wide range of styles of reminiscence that can have a helpful, neutral or harmful influence on the reminiscer's mental health.

5. An individual's life experience is always more extensive than the story they tell. Therefore, a life story will always be selective.

6. The act of reviewing one's past is a present event. It is a reconstruction of the past in terms of the participant's current belief and construct systems. During the early segment of this research I viewed reminiscence as a far more passive and inactive process.

7. I believe in and appreciate the therapeutic possibilities of reviewing one's life. As in counselling, I believe the reminiscence process can help individuals attain coherent meaning and purpose through the recall and discussion of past events.

Explicating Assumptions and Pre-Understandings

Many of my beliefs and assumptions are portrayed in perhaps a more meaningful way through the following discussion and metaphor.

During a conversation with a friend a number of years ago, I reflected on why I enjoyed travelling so much. While I certainly appreciate the rich and challenging experiences that take place when visiting foreign countries, I concluded that it was the fact that those experiences remain accessible to me and continuously influence me that really drives me to

explore the world. During this conversation I came up with the metaphor, which may not bear too close a scrutiny, of me living my life like a builder constructing a home. The present experiences are the materials for which the newest room is constructed and throughout life, when long standing relationships (things, places and people) conclude, a door is closed on one room and we walk into a new place on which we build. But this completed room always remains, and along with a hall of other rooms, we can choose to revisit it, pass it by, and even renovate or remodel from time to time. When I strengthen a current meaningful relationship it is satisfying for me to think I am building a beautiful room which I can later revisit and admire the materials and workmanship involved in its construction. And one day, when I sense my life is close to an end, I hope I can tour my house and conclude that it is indeed a nice bit of work.

I also think it might be all the more satisfying to take a younger meaningful person with me on this tour and like a master craftsman and an apprentice, show her or him some of the skills and lessons that will be helpful to them in the construction of their own lives.

My belief in this metaphor has led me to get involved in counselling the elderly and facilitating several reminiscence groups. During these group experiences I have fostered the belief that everyone has a story to tell and in most cases this story focuses on the validating and joyful parts of their life. Clearly it seems that the tour most people give of the life they have constructed centres on selected masterpieces while leaving other doors closed. When the expressed memories are painful, however, in most cases the stories seem to focus on how that individual has learned to cope with the loss or

regret. With clear permission and opportunity to tell their story to others who are prepared to listen, almost all the group members I have worked with have provided a meaningful story and appeared to find the experience satisfying and reinforcing.

Participants

Lincon and Guba (1985) argue that "all sampling is done with some purpose in mind" (p. 199). In this study I employed a limited version of maximum variation sampling (Patton, 1980) in an effort to detail the many specifics that give each context its unique flavour (Lincon and Guba, 1985). As it turned out, the participants who expressed interest in this study were quite diverse in regards to such factors as socioeconomic status, education, marital status and gender. The fact that three out of the four participants were female attests to the difficulty I experienced finding male participants. This was perhaps partly due to the underrepresentation of males in the participants' age group.

It was also important for the purposes of this study that the participants shared some characteristics. Because recent research has differentiated the types of reminiscence used by the aged and found that some individuals either strongly dislike reminiscing (Coleman, 1986; Sherman, 1991) or use it to obsessively dwell on negative life experiences (Watt & Wong, 1991), the prospective participants were screened. This screening process consisted of setting up an initial interview and asking each participant if reminiscing is usually a positive, neutral or negative experience for them. Only interested individuals who usually find reminiscing a positive

or neutral experience, are able to articulate their feelings towards reminiscence and have an accessible grandchild were accepted as participants for the study. Selected participants, and their grandchildren, were then informed of the nature and purpose of the research and the fact that they had the right to withdraw at any time. Finally, the consent form (Appendix A) was presented and explained so the participants understood the level of anonymity and confidentiality provided.

The participants in this study were four grandparent volunteers over the age of sixty-five years who live in the Victoria Capital Regional District. These subjects were contacted through discussing the research with friends and family members, the posting of notices at seniors' organizations (New Horizons, Silver Threads) and local newspaper advertisements.

Through the use of purposeful sampling in qualitative research a rich understanding of select cases can occur but this understanding may not be universally shared (Patton, 1979). Although this study does not, and is not intended to, reveal the experience of all grandparents who take part in reminiscence therapy with a grandchild, it does provide some insights about how this activity was experienced by these four participants and how it may be experienced by others in similar circumstances. The identified experiences of these participants then, can be seen as a representation of how other seniors may experience a similar form of reminiscence therapy and therefore may help to form a more effective way of conducting such therapy with seniors. During the interview with the fourth participant I began to recognize many similar themes and experiences. This is not to suggest that I have

exhausted all the possible experiences of this phenomena but I do believe that I have approached the criteria of redundancy (Lincon and Guba, 1985) through my explication of the four participants' experiences.

Design

The design presented below is the one that was used during the data gathering and analysis portions of this study and resembles, but is not reproduction of, the design delineated in the proposal. As Patton (1990) states, "a qualitative design unfolds as fieldwork unfolds. The design is partially emergent as the study occurs" (p. 61).

This inquiry is a qualitative descriptive study using audiotaped, indepth, one-to-one interviews. The interviews were analyzed phenomenologically in an attempt to explicate and explore each participant's experience of doing reminiscence therapy in the presence of a grandchild.

Reminiscence Interview Format

Some research suggests that a semi-structured reminiscence interview format is more effective than a completely open ended unstructured approach (Merriam, 1986). It seems that the retrieval of important memories may be easier for participants if some form of structural constraints are placed on the scope of the reminiscence. Originally, this structure was to be provided in the reminiscence conversations by chapters created by each participant prior to the interviews that together form a narrative story of the participant's life. Each participant was asked to spend two

separate one and a half hour long sessions (approximately) reminiscing on these stages or chapters. The headings of these chapters could correspond to developmental stages, historical occurrences, geographical locations or whatever the participant believed most appropriately represents the course of their life. Interestingly, the first three grandparents were unwilling or forgot to complete this chaptering task and because of this reaction I did not introduce the idea to my last grandparent participant. When asked about their choice to not complete the chaptering task the first two grandparent participants both indicated that they preferred to wait for our meeting and the actual reminiscence conversations before they examined the pattern of their life course. This explanation at least suggests a desire on the participant's part to reminisce and construct their life stories in the presence of others. The reminiscence conversations then, were quite unstructured save for a general tendency for the dialogue to consist of stories, follow a chronological course and focus on specific themes. None of the participants appeared to experience any difficulty in remembering stories of their past and describing them to their grandchild.

In most cases the first interview covered the first half (approximately) of each participant's life story and the remaining portion was discussed in the final reminiscence interview. Only in very few instances did a participant seem stuck and I then made inquiries in an attempt to help them to get back on track. These inquiry topics were chosen to fit with the current style and content of the participant's previous memories. Participants were also invited to bring and use any props (photo albums, heirlooms, etc.) that could aid in their reminiscence process. All four participants used

photo albums which seemed to facilitate the reminiscence process and provide a tangible referent that appeared to invite the grandchildren to actively participate in the process. The two reminiscence conversations held with each participant and grandchild occurred within a four day period.

During these reminiscence conversations the participants were asked to face their grandchild and direct their recollections to him or her. I remained close to the participant and grandchild of each pair but faced between the two and limited my interjections to prompts, clarifications and active listening. I limited my comments in order to encourage a natural exchange between the grandparent and grandchild and to enable the grandparents to construct their memories in a narrative form. Polkinghorne (1988) states, "when respondents are allowed to continue in their own way ... they are likely to relate stories". The grandchildren were invited to ask questions and make comments during the grandparent's reminiscence process in a way that felt natural and appropriate to their relationship. Finally, at the end of the last interview each grandparent participant was asked to describe what events were the most crucial turning points in their lives to reveal any themes that may not have been included in the preceding discussions (Bruner, 1986).

Final Interview Format

After the reminiscence conversations each grandparent participant underwent an indepth, face-to-face, audiotaped interview with only the researcher present. Because the focus of this inquiry concerns the grandparents' experience of reminiscing with a grandchild no data was gathered from the

grandchildren. These final discussions were designed to illuminate the participants' experience of the reminiscence activity. These interviews took place no later than two days after the last reminiscence interview so the participants' reminiscence experiences remained fresh in their minds. I believe I developed sound and trusting relationships with all the participants and so a conversational mode of communication was encouraged in this final interview. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) claim that the conversational mode communicates empathy, encouragement, and understanding... [and] is most likely to elicit the trust, confidence and ease among respondents necessary for yielding elaborate, subtle, and valid data" (p. 131). This interview format was open-ended and based on the assumption that "the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit" (Patton, 1990, p. 278). I maintained a neutral and nonjudgmental stance toward whatever content emerged while using personal experience and empathic insight to understand the participants' experience. There was also no time constraints on these final interviews; each participant was interviewed until they believed that they had exhausted their relevant thoughts concerning their experience of the phenomenon.

The indepth, open-ended interview method was chosen because it can be highly effective in gathering rich and detailed information (Colaizzi, 1978) which can then be organized and structured in meaningful ways. This method also helps ensure that the study is non-manipulative, unobtrusive and fully open to the participant's experience (Patton, 1990).

Research Questions

An interview guide was used to ensure comparability

across participants and confirm that all relevant topics were discussed (Patton, 1987). These questions were formulated from consultation with fellow counsellors, research literature and personal experience. Clarification and elaboration probes were used flexibly as was deemed appropriate for each participant and they were, in most cases, non-directive, and kept to a minimum since volunteered data is considered the most trustworthy.

Each interview began with some informal conversation which led to my asking, "What was this reminiscence experience like for you?" If, in the course of discussing this broad question, one or more of the other questions in the interview guide were satisfactorily explored then those questions were not asked later in the interview. The use of broad and open-ended questions invited the participants to set the direction of the interview and thus avoid researcher bias (Bogden & Biklen, 1982; Dobbert, 1982). There were however, times when I felt it was appropriate to "re-orient" my participants to the question using a prompt or a summary statement.

Interview Guide

1. What was this reminiscence experience like for you?
2. In what ways, if any, was this experience meaningful to you?
3. What sorts of feelings did the reminiscence experience evoke in you?
4. How do you think the presence of your grandchild affected what you remembered and how you remembered?
5. What kind of influence, if any, has this experience had on the way you think and feel about your grandchild?
6. What kind of influence, if any, has this experience had on the way you think and feel about yourself?

Data Analysis

The phenomenological interpretation of the data took the form of "an open dialogue between the researcher's explicit psychological reflection and the subject's 'naive', prescientific description" (Giorgi 1987, p. 16). In human inquiry the researcher is aware of always being within a hermeneutic circle of interpretation. In the case of this study I worked with the participants to interpret and illuminate their interpretations of how they experienced the reminiscence activity. Both myself and the participants shared the same goal of understanding human experience and our relationships were non hierarchical and based on equality and partnership.

The audiotape interviews and written transcripts were analyzed inductively according to what I believe to be the most appropriate aspects of the frameworks provided by Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1985), Corbin and Strauss (1990) and van Manen (1990). The steps taken in the analysis process are summarized below.

1. I carefully reviewed the audiotapes and reread the transcripts until I gained a sense of the data as a whole (Giorgi, 1985). While reviewing the audiotapes I made a point to note clear changes in each participant's voice tone, temperament, and emphasis. These subtle behaviour changes were then indicated on the transcript.

During this phase of the investigation I worked hard to maintain an attitude of what Giorgi (1987) calls "openness". To be open to the data, like being open to a counselling client, I "bracketed" my preconceptions (in the manner previously discussed) immersed myself in the details of the language, taking time to discover and explore the possible

meanings in which the data refers.

All the participants were interviewed and our conversations were transcribed before any data analysis took place. This was done for reasons of convenience and I found it helpful to be able to focus on interviewing, then transcribing, then analysis, for extended periods of time.

2. I then returned to the data and extracted the sentences, phrases and statements that directly related to the phenomenon being investigated (van Manen, 1990; Colaizzi, 1978). I followed Giorgi's (1987) advice and took a conservative approach to this discarding process for what at first appears to be irrelevant to the phenomena may be discovered to be relevant upon deeper reflection. I then re-examined this selected text and highlighted the words and statements that seemed to reveal the most about my participants' experience. Tesch (1987) aptly described this process as "panning for precious elements", which take the form of descriptive expressions in the material that are at the centre of the experience" (p. 232).

3. While studying the details of the participants' language very closely and using "creative insight" I then attempted to systematically explicate the fundamental meaning of each significant statement. This was accomplished through the close examination of the selected text from a "psychological perspective" (Giorgi, 1987) and conceptualizing the everyday language to form units of meaning (Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

4. The concepts and meaning units that seemed to pertain to the same phenomena were then placed in categories and sub categories. This categorization process was accomplished by extracting unique and non repetitive concepts and meaning

units from the data and relating and combining them (Colaizzi, 1978). I used creative insight, imaginative variation, questioning, close analysis of single words, phrases and sentences and other procedures such as far-out and close-in comparisons to construct these categories (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). The properties and dimensions of these categories were also noted (Corbin and Strauss).

5. Through the comparison of categories (themes) and reflection, an effort was made to systematically explicate the phenomena's constituents with the aim of creating an exhaustive description of my participants' experience of the phenomena. The phenomenon was described through the art of writing and rewriting (van Manen, 1990).

6. After a thorough description of each individual's experience of the phenomena was achieved, similarities and differences between the participants' experiences were discussed. This was an attempt to integrate all the interpretive work done on the research so far.

7. Finally, the relevance of my findings to the use of this reminiscence activity and the field of counselling is discussed.

Trustworthiness of the Inquiry

The "truth value" or trustworthiness of the findings have been examined in a way that is congruent with the naturalistic paradigm (Lincon and Guba, 1985). To ensure something comparable to internal validity the research must do two things. First, the study must be carried out in a way that enhances the probability of producing credible results. Second, the researcher must demonstrate the credibility of his

findings by having them approved by the research participants (Lincon and Guba, 1985). The well established and documented data collection and analysis procedures set out in the methodology of this inquiry satisfy the first directive. The second was accomplished by ensuring that my findings were viewed as accurate by the participants in this study.

Member Checks

Once I finished writing my individual explication of the reminiscence conversations held with each participant I paid another visit to each grandparent and asked them to spend some time reading my analysis. Approximately one week later I called the participants to enquire about their thoughts and feelings concerning what I had written. I explained the process of analysis that lead me to my conclusions and answered any questions raised. I also encouraged the participants to add, change or delete anything that struck them as not being true to their experience. All the participants were satisfied with the accuracy of the observations and interpretations I made concerning our conversations. Of the four participants only two asked me to change parts of my analysis and these changes concerned two technical details (one about my description of trolley cars and another concerned a participant's level of proficiency in foreign languages). In general, the participants were very pleased with the writing both in terms of how they were represented and the accuracy of my descriptions and interpretations.

This checking-up process adds credibility to the findings

and is promoted by Lincoln and Guba (1981) who believe it is important to "take data and interpretations to the source from which they were drawn and ask directly whether they believe, find plausible - the results".

Hycner (1985) also recommends several other forms of validation. Besides member checks Hycner suggests the researcher evaluate whether or not the findings seem accurate based on the researcher's own experiences and the observations of the relevant literature. As Polkinghorne (1988) states, "human science can no longer only seek mathematical and logical certainty. Instead, it should also aim at producing results that are believable and verisimilar" (p. 161). The themes and general findings of this study do fit well with my own experiences as a grandchild, reminiscer and facilitator of reminiscence groups. The findings also correspond quite closely to many of the ideas discussed in the literature reviewed earlier in this inquiry. Furthermore, I have discussed my research with several other helping professionals, one who specializes in gerontology, and while they have not undertaken a detailed evaluation their reactions to the inquiry and its findings have been enthusiastic and very supportive.

CHAPTER 4

THEMES IN THE PARTICIPANTS' REMINISCENCE CONVERSATIONS

The purpose of this research was to gain some understanding of grandparents' experience of reminiscence therapy in the presence of a grandchild with particular emphasis on the grandchild's effect on this experience. My efforts to achieve this purpose were dialogical and focused on participant-researcher discourse and researcher-literature discourse. In this chapter I have presented the major themes which have risen from the discourse between myself (which includes my previously mentioned assumptions) and the participants (which includes the data transcribed from our reminiscence conversations and final interview as well as information included through member checks). The relevant literature will be incorporated into a discussion of all the participants' themes in the next chapter.

Don and Alex

I first met Don fifteen years ago when I became one of his grandson Alex's good friends. Don had always appeared to me to be a sensitive, discerning and wise man who loved to interact with people. Throughout our occasional interactions over the years I noticed that Don loved to tell stories about his past and he did so in a vibrant and engaging way that seemed to enhance his presence in the moment. He also clearly took delight in relating these stories to Alex and other family members who seemed to relished the opportunity to hear them. It was with these considerations in mind that I decided to approach Don about being a part of this research project. To my delight he graciously accepted.

"This Room is Full of Memorabilia"

Prior to our reminiscence interviews I had suggested to Don that he might like to display photos or other memorabilia to help jog his memory during the reminiscence process. So I was not surprised when Don, Alex and I began the first reminiscence conversation, to see his dining room table covered with old photographs. At the beginning of both reminiscence meetings Don and Alex gravitated to the photo table and the questions and stories immediately began.

Perhaps because the photographs were tangible referents that Don and Alex could both directly appreciate, there was significantly more verbal interaction between them while they focused on the photographs than when Don's reminiscences had no concrete referent. This high level of interaction can also be partly explained by the fact that most of the photographs were of family members, many of whom are known by both Don and Alex. In one such interaction Don demonstrated concern with Alex's knowledge of family members:

Don: That's your Auntie Gail. There's Ann again. Now you've got to figure out who this is. A darned good picture too... Don't take so long you should know...

Alex: Boy, you really put me on the spot.
Auntie Bet?

Don: That's right.

Although Don worried that Alex did not want to "look through all of these pictures" and he "just got them out to refresh [his] memory" Alex claimed that he "would love to spend a lot of time looking through" them. It seems then, that the photographs helped to stimulate Don's memory and, because of

their concrete and family oriented nature, they also appeared to invite Alex to take a more active role in the conversation.

In almost every case, the photos led to stories about important people who enriched Don's life. These stories, in turn, often lead to discussions of abstract concepts such as friendship, security and love. In one instance, Don pointed out his deceased wife's huge hat to Alex.

Don: Notice the hat your grandmother is wearing.

Alex: It's huge.

Don: Well that's made of kitchen wood. It was made in the Philippines I guess and I, I, was very sentimental about it you know. When I was in love with a girl and courting and that sort of thing you know I was I was full of romance and sentiment.

The sight of the hat led Don to remember another photo he carried with him through the war years of his wife "with this huge hat leaning against a fir tree on Gonzales Point...just leaning against the tree". The photograph clearly helped Don to remember his wife's hat and the intense feelings of love that he felt in the days when she wore the hat. The topic of love then became the focal point in which our conversation away from the photograph table developed.

The use of tangible objects to trigger and explicate memories did not end when the conversation moved from the photo table to Don's living room. Before long, Don pointed to the hearth on his fireplace and explained that his father's watch was there. This led to a description of the immense feelings of security he felt when he was with his father and how that security is still triggered by the watch and the smell of pipe tobacco.

I had a sense of security when I was with him, some extra strength. When I spoke of the watch and the tobacco I can remember being very upset, being very terribly upset about something, and Dad would come and I would just rush at him and bury my head in his belly and put my arms around him. Of course I would be about yeah high and my ear would come right up against his pocket watch. There was two things, the smell of his tobacco and the tick of his watch, they were sheer magic therapy, even to this day.

Don has deeply associated the pocket watch and pipe odour with the powerful sense of security fostered by his father; and so, in a sense, Don's father's ability to help him feel secure lives on through these accessible and tangible articles. Alex replied to this story by declaring that some of "the earliest memories" he has of his grandfather (Don) "centre around the scent of pipe tobacco". Alex then stated with a wide grin, "I kept on thinking about you when you were talking about the wonderful sensation of coming into the house and smelling that tobacco, it's funny I never thought about that". The reminiscence conversations then, revealed a shared association between the tangible scent of pipe tobacco (Don and Alex might call it a fragrance) and a loved parental figure. It clearly seemed like an intergenerational connection had been made.

The fireplace also became a tangible focal point for reminiscence. Don carefully described to Alex the nature of the stone in the fireplace which "was partially granite and mica". Characteristically, Don's narrative gracefully transformed from the concrete, present and often educationally oriented, to a story about people. In this case, how his daughters (Alex's mother and aunt) would run to the fireplace to get dressed every morning. "And boy would they dress in a hurry!"

Perhaps the best example of Don's ability to make the transcendental leap from concrete referents to vital memories of people and events in his past is portrayed as in the following statement:

Um, I take a look about me and everywhere I look I see something that I can thank someone for. It's a fact, oh yes, I can remember who gave me that; I can remember who told me how to make that. Everywhere I turn I can remember who did that for me.

Don followed up this statement by pointing to the oak floor and telling the story of the "wonderful man", the "great man" who generously supplied the tools and know-how to help him put the floor together. Although there were only a modest number of portraits on Don's walls it became clear that his entire home was full of referents to important people in his life which constantly remind him of their love and friendship.

"We Gain from Our Fellow Creatures"

On several occasions during our conversations Don strongly emphasised how he believes that other living creatures have been responsible for much of the happiness and fulfilment he has experienced during his life. Don's recognition of the importance of his relationships is both an important theme of our conversations and a thread that runs throughout the entire narrative connecting and unifying its various parts. Many of Don's stories began as descriptions of a diverse range of subjects and seemed to naturally develop into depictions of the supportive, influential and inspirational people in his life. It was with obvious delight that he spoke about the paediatrician surgeon who, for months, gave blood transfusions to his "brand new baby". The surgeon

only charged Don ten dollars for his services because he knew Don could afford no more. Don's animated articulation and vivid expressions portrayed his "unspeakable, indescribable feeling of gratitude". Similarly, in telling the story of his father's last days, Don did not focus his narrative on the sadness or loss but the "bunch of angels" who cared for his dad and held up his pipe when he was too weak and unsteady to smoke. Moreover, although there was much about his military experience that he "detested" it was "not the people" he disliked for this is where Don met some of his "finest friends". Moreover, the "finest part of the work" Don did for the Canadian Pacific Railway during his long career was dealing with the "shrewd and capable" but "courteous" merchants. On several other occasions Don discussed the teachers, friends and others who gave him the direction, inspiration and vision to navigate his life course successfully. Don's positive depictions of those who shared important parts of his life permeated our conversations and seemed to liken his reminiscence experience to an enjoyable visit with old friends.

Although many of the people who have been important in Don's life "are now gone", he strongly believes that they "leave an inheritance with you", a "gift", and it is a "degree of failure" to "never touch it, never use it, never contemplate it". For Don remembering friends who have passed away is not only personally satisfying but a social responsibility. To not appreciate one's past relationships is a degree of failure partly because, as Don states, "I realize in retrospect now how much I owe my fellow man. I will never be able to compensate for how much I owe". Don's praising stories then, may be a way of thanking those who so positively

influenced, and continue to influence, his life. Don's ability to transcend the tangible and use reminiscence to enjoy the "gifts" of past relationships (and thus pay tribute to those beings) is clearly demonstrated when he describes the parallel between a tangible gift, a book, and the gift of friendship and love.

If you pick up that book and you've read it...
if you thumb through it before you put it back
on the shelf and contemplate the giver. So it
is when you've had dear friends and family and
now they have gone.

For Don the opportunity to reminisce and tell his life story enabled him to publicly praise and celebrate those with whom he had meaningful relationships. The experience gave Don a chance to gaze admiringly at the gifts he has been left and express his appreciation and gratitude for them. For Don, this opportunity was a "very nice gain indeed".

In many ways the fact that Don can, at any time, appreciate and re-live the important memories others have left him demonstrates that the meaningfulness of a relationship for him does not necessarily end with death and the passage of time. This understanding of how memory can transcend mortality seems to have helped Don to conquer some of his own fear of death.

Many of the people with whom I associated are now gone and, its very hard to express this, I think I acquired a sort of a comfort, a comfortable reinforcement. I think I ended up the talk the other night saying that I didn't think I was now afraid of death. The fact that I made that remark to you is indicative that I had gained something from these conversations.

The gain for Don then, is the comfortable reinforcement of understanding that, for him, those who he loved and are now

gone are still accessible through reminiscence. As Don states, "now my parents, my friends are almost nearer to me on account of these interviews". By using his reminiscences to appreciate the gifts he has inherited from others, Don's relationships with those who were so important to him lives on.

Our conversations indicated that Don's positive orientation towards others is so potent that it overlaps with his self-concept. Don seems to realize this when he mentions that "it had never occurred to him before" but,

I can't remember being very much as a separate person, as an entity, as a single unit, as a one being. I'm always with my father or I'm always with my teacher, or I'm with my family or me and my dog. You know, I'm always with another living creature in my recollection.

Don's relationships seem to be so important that he can only recall himself in relation to others. The deaths of these significant individuals may well have equated to the death of part of himself. Conversely, bringing the image of these people back to life through reminiscence may have helped Don to revitalize important beneficial and greatly missed parts of himself.

Through our reminiscence conversations Don appeared to realize that the influence of important individuals in his life continues well past their deaths. Moreover, because these relationship gifts constitute an important part of his identity, the act of "contemplating the giver" of these gifts may also be the act of positively reconstructing his own self-concept. This ability to appreciate the gifts of others helped Don to conclude that, "I have had quote, unquote, a fortunate life in so many ways."

"An Enjoyable and Therapeutic Experience"

On several occasions during our conversations, Don described his experience of the reminiscence activity as being both "enjoyable" and "therapeutic". From these comments, and my own observations of our conversations, it seems clear that, in general, Don's experience of recalling and recounting his life stories was a pleasurable one. Don describes feeling validated by the experience below.

It warms me now, and as we talked I felt almost reinforced in some of my beliefs and my reactions. I felt reinforced, I felt a sort of endorsement in some respects here and there throughout my life I was on the right track.

For Don, "It's a great blessing when we can pick out laughter and a giggle" and the high proportion of positive and humorous stories Don discussed suggest that he found much of the reminiscence experience a "blessing".

Beyond the feelings of satisfaction, endorsement and approval that come from reflecting on positive events and relationships Don also "gained" in a "therapeutic" sense in that he uncovered and acknowledged (sometimes only to himself) some of the memories he is not proud of. Don gained some degree of personal satisfaction, insight and growth from publicly acknowledging and relating these memories. The most central example of Don facing a past regret (here we are looking at a process analogous to "life review") concerns his belief that he never appreciated his mother. Although Don speaks of his mother with a great deal of love he also acknowledges on several occasions, "I did disappoint my mother a great deal". He concedes that he never realized how much he "owed" his mother as a child and the reminiscence process, and prior years of reflecting on her musical skills and wisdom,

has led him to state, "I realize now what I missed with my mother". The emotional implications of this realization are clearly expressed in the following statement:

Now I'm beginning to realize, Moyer you should have paid more attention; you disappointed a certain person, you should have done this or if I had only done that. Its almost like a degree of remorse... You know, in recollection there is a feeling of remorse and remorse is a horrible thing... but it sneaks in.

In this instance the reminiscence activity has lead Don to confront and struggle to accept his regrettable past behaviour.

Don responded to this remorse by telling several descriptive stories about his mother that accentuate her "beauty," her "skill," her "bravery" and her "thoroughness". Through these public recollections Don managed to transcend some of his remorse and regret and end up with at least a sense of resolution.

Now! I look back and I say, you idiot, you self satisfied cluck! You should have realized your mother knew what she was talking about. Ha ha, there's great satisfaction in it, its regret and remorse, but there is satisfaction too in at least I realize now the values my mother had.

The satisfaction in appreciating and paying tribute to his mother is accompanied by a sense of gratification from acknowledging past mistakes, accepting them, and going on. On the issue of past regrets, Don believes that "contemplating them is a form of acknowledgement" and "we have to acknowledge, even if it is just to ourselves, that we goofed here and there along the way". For Don it was "therapeutic" to "bring it out in the light and have a look at it". And it was "kind of nice to feel, well, so I made a proper fool of myself but what's to be ashamed of? Perhaps I'm not so much

of an exception as part of a mortal pattern". By taking this regret "out into the light" Don was able to re-frame the situation from that of a personal failure to a reflection of universal imperfection. Don also believes that this "acknowledgement" of past mistakes strengthens his "stature", it "helps to replace some of the sand that has slipped out of [his] structure of life". This comment seems to reflect a notion similar to redemption through confession in which failures and regrets are 'aired' which relieves guilt and promotes strength and healing. Don also indicated that the more he reviews his life, from a late-life perspective, "the easier it is for [him] to say, What the hell man! What have you been afraid of"? For Don then, some of the therapeutic functions of his reminiscence experience include the sense of becoming stronger by being able to acknowledge and accept his regrets and put some regrets into perspective which undercuts their importance in the context of his life.

The reminiscence conversations that we had together were also just one part of Don's process of acknowledging, accepting and resolving his past regrets. After relating his regrets concerning his relationship with his mother, Don told the story of how he learned to appreciate the "beautifully written" music manuscripts his mother had created. Don had tried to write music manuscripts himself and compared to his mothers his "looked as though some drunk had slopped all over the pages". Clearly regretting he had not appreciated his mother's skill earlier, Don wrote several letters and contacted the church in England where she played most of her music and sent the church organist most of her original manuscripts. There was a subtle current of satisfaction in Don's voice when he said, "the letter I wrote was published in

the church magazine and mother's music in the church archives". Don also enjoyed relating how he once pursued and found duet music for a song his mother once frequently sang and he loved to hear. Don then sang this song with his granddaughter in what was a very enjoyable and meaningful experience. For Don then, the reminiscence process was a helpful part of an ongoing process of discovering and appreciating who his mother was and expressing his appreciation through appropriate acts of commemoration.

"Here, Let Me Show You"

A primary interest of this study, besides learning how the participants experienced the reminiscence process as a whole, concerns the affect their grandchild's presence had on the participant's experience of reminiscing. When I asked Don about what it was like to have Alex with him, he stated that the issue was a "delicate aspect". I immediately recalled earlier during the reminiscence conversations, when Don and Alex were discussing a particularly meaningful family photograph and Don turned to me and said "now this is family stuff you know". These incidents seem to indicate that the family oriented social context brought issues to the forefront that Don was hesitant to completely share with me. This highlights the intimate atmosphere created for Don by having his grandson present and likely differentiates this experience from other possible reminiscence experiences without close family members present. Despite his apprehension Don did provide some valuable insights on the effect Alex had on his reminiscence experience.

Don strongly believes that "the fact Alex was there"

"influenced" his "speaking", his "enunciation" and "had a bearing on the way in which [he] couched [his] words". Although he found it "difficult to explain" how and why this influence operated he did conclude that had Alex not been there he would probably have put things in a more "stilted and "stereotyped" way. Alex's presence and participation in the reminiscence conversations seemed to lead Don to feel a "desire to entertain and use words that are pleasing to the listener". In short, it seems that Don wanted to make sure Alex enjoyed the experience and so he used an engaging and entertaining style of communicating when recalling his life stories.

Alex's presence also influenced the stories Don chose to tell. With Alex present, Don felt a "degree of intimacy" and "closeness" in the social context and he "quite often put things in such a way that I thought might be helpful to him and good for him". Don seemed to capture the essence of how Alex influenced the stories he chose to tell with the words, "here, let me show you".

I used those words, let me show you, because they weren't spoken and re-spoken but that's the mental bit that had a bearing...It's different having a grandchild there and the difference is um, an inherent desire to convey things in a helpful way.

As Don reviewed his life, he felt a "tendency to convey a method, convey a way of thinking, convey a way of doing something" and these educational tendencies were certainly reflected in the text of his narrative.

Don's detailed descriptions of how to operate a hay-bailer, work with stone and drive a model T Ford are examples of interactive exchanges which focused on showing Alex how to physically do something. But most examples of Don "showing"

Alex something came through the use of stories and their accompanying messages and morals. These stories often focused on conveying "a way of thinking" and they were presented through descriptions of incidents in which Don had himself learned a valuable lesson. In one case Don described himself as a "brash office boy" who greeted one Chinese merchant with the question, "you like see boss"? To Don's intense embarrassment, the Chinese merchant made an eloquent reply in "beautiful cultured English". After blushing so hard Don thought he "had a sunburn" he swore he would never make "the same mistake again". Don also warned Alex to "be careful not to invent shades of grey" when making difficult decisions for "if we invent enough shades of grey, for our own convenience, we become spineless". This point was also reinforced by frequent and appreciative descriptions of how his father often talked to him "in no uncertain terms" and thus set clear and solid guidelines for him to follow. Don also attempted to teach Alex about the process of developing "maturity". For Don, one important step in his journey towards "maturity" was being able to endure the "the pang" of "losing something" and finally let his adult daughters go their own ways. Don looked intently at Alex and said that it was "a good thing I did lose something" because if "people" do not they can "become selfishly obsessed with people and direct their lives too much". That, Don stated to Alex, "is a process of family life".

Don's painful recognition of his failure to appreciate his mother was also partly a lesson which was conveyed through "showing" Alex his own learning process. After speaking at length about "realizing" what he "missed" with his mother Don concluded that,

It's best not to accentuate the negative. It's best not to put great store on the mistakes you see a person making in comparison to the values you attach to their successes or their attributes.

The message Don has learned, and seems to be trying to convey, is that people should emphasize the positive when considering others. Don again seemed to be inviting Alex to learn from Don's mistakes when he stated, "Even if we see someone else make a mistake, well most of us have the sense to learn when we see another guy fall flat on his face". Don then, appears to use his own mistakes in his relationship with his mother as an example Alex can learn from and avoid the regrets he now grapples with.

Using the reminiscence activity to "show" Alex a few useful things about life also helped to make the experience enjoyable and satisfying for Don.

It was great having the grandson there and I enjoyed speaking in such a way that it would be of particular interest if not help... If out of that I can find the least shred or particle that would be of use to my kids or my kid's kids it has to give me satisfaction.

For Don, "helping someone or being of some use to someone certainly gives you satisfaction". This satisfaction through being helpful is clearly another aspect of why Don experienced the reminiscence activity as being enjoyable and therapeutic. Perhaps for a man who believes he has "gained so much" from his "fellow creatures" giving back through lessons of life is a particularly satisfying endeavour.

"God's Clean Winds"

Don's lesson concerning the importance of emphasising the positive was clearly practised by him in his choice of stories to tell to Alex. "Like all mortals", Don acknowledged, "I

tend to want to remember the beautiful things which, I feel, is a good thing" and "shelve or file away things that were...less than admirable". Although Don gained "satisfaction" and "stature" by acknowledging his mistakes he undoubtedly emphasised the positive aspects of his life. This choice reflects Don's personal preference to recall and tell positive stories as well as his social desire to "entertain and use words that are pleasing to the listener".

To illustrate this positive orientation, Don read a quote that a friend had written for his own epitaph. Don's friend wanted to be remembered as someone "who takes his failures with him into God's clean winds". "So in telling you the story of my life", Don exclaimed, "why recite my failures? I'll take them with me into God's clean winds". "Let them bath their hands in sorrowful things, let society relish the unsavoury. When we are dead how much does it matter"? For Don then, the "unsavoury" memories are better recorded and acknowledged on a private slate and blown clean by the universal forces that reveal their insignificance.

Indeed, the vast majority of the stories Don told were positively oriented and the experience of taking these affirmative memories off the shelf (often the gifts of others now gone) and polishing them to a shine again was reinforcing in many ways. This enjoyment coloured the flow of the entire narrative which Don ended with a satisfied sense of general accomplishment. "But with all of it we really enjoyed ourselves. That's been the pattern of our lives, we've managed to enjoy ourselves as we've gone along."

Summary

During our reminiscence conversations Don used photographs and other tangible memorabilia to stimulate his memory and remind him of the important people and issues in his life. The tangible and family oriented nature of these memorabilia seemed to prompt a higher level of interaction between Don and Alex. Don credits other beings with providing much of the success and happiness he has experienced throughout his life. He believes that his fond memories of those important individuals who have passed away are their gifts to him and it is his personal desire and social responsibility to appreciate these gifts through reminiscence. When used in this way, Don believes that his recollections can maintain life in his relationships with loved ones who are now gone and this idea lessens his own fear of death.

In general, Don found the reminiscence activity to be an enjoyable experience in that he believed the review validated and endorsed the manner in which he has lived his life. Don also found aspects of the experience to be therapeutic in that it enabled him to acknowledge past mistakes and regrets and even work to resolve these issues through accepting his mistakes, normalizing his regrets and reframing his regrets from a mature perspective.

Alex's presence influenced the way Don told his stories and the choice of stories he chose to tell. In an effort to ensure Alex enjoyed the conversations, Don presented his stories in an engaging and entertaining way. He also chose to tell stories designed to reveal some of the important lessons he has learned throughout his life-course. Don felt gratified

by the thought that he might help Alex, in any way, by telling him about what he has learned through his experiences. Finally, Don focused his stories on positive memories because these are the most important recollections to him and they are the most enjoyable memories to remember and tell as well as to hear. For Don, the unpleasant memories are not worth telling because they will eventually be rendered meaningless in the grand scheme of life.

Elaine and Lisa

Elaine is a healthy seventy-five year old woman who lives alone but remains socially active. She is a confident, intelligent and independent woman who finds time for community volunteer work and maintains strong ties to her family and friends. Elaine and Lisa (her twenty-three year old granddaughter) have a very close relationship and clearly share similar strong and confident personality characteristics. Both women appeared to settle into the conversations in a natural and comfortable way with Lisa taking a very active part in the process.

"A Renewed Stab of Grief"

During our reminiscence conversations Elaine spoke at length about her extremely happy relationship with her second husband Jack who died five and a half years ago. The process of describing their shared experiences appeared to be an enjoyable one for Elaine but after both reminiscence conversations she reported being "surprised" by feeling

"miserable" and being unable to sleep. Elaine later reported that speaking to Lisa about Jack "intensified" and "focused" her sense of loss and highlighted her belief that "so much of [her] life is gone and can never come back". This "renewed stab of grief" surprised Elaine because it was not present during the activity and she thought she had dealt with her loss to the point where her thoughts of Jack triggered mostly happy feelings.

Elaine's thirteen years of volunteer work and personal experience at Hospice have helped her to become very self-aware in terms of her progress through the grieving process. She recently noticed "a shift" in which her memories of Jack made her "smile" more often than they made her "cry". This new positive orientation was expressed during the reminiscence conversations when Elaine referred to meeting Jack as "the best thing" that ever happened to her and their time together as the "biggest highlight" of her life. But by acknowledging how wonderful life was with Jack she was apparently also underlining how much she misses him in her life today. Although Elaine had positively framed her relationship with Jack during the reminiscence activity, (and nonverbally she certainly appeared to enjoy describing their relationship) after our conversations, while she was trying to sleep, she seemed to have suffered a emotional backlash. She became overcome by a "profound regret" that her partner, through some of her best years of life, is gone forever.

Content Control, Personal Factors

When reminiscing, Elaine reported that she "didn't feel any need to hold anything back" from her granddaughter because

she "was not consciously trying to present any kind of a picture". She did, however, acknowledge that many of her stories had similarities and followed patterns that depicted herself and her life in a consistent way. One clear pattern was the predominantly positive nature of the memories she described. Elaine believes that "people think of things that give them pleasure more than pain" and most of the stories she told certainly portrayed a woman who has had a "pretty happy life in general". In reflecting on the conversations, Elaine confessed that she didn't mention that much about the "tough times" and that she "may have done that subconsciously without realizing it". She clearly found talking to Lisa about these "good", "humorous" and "happy" memories extremely enjoyable and often her facial expressions and voice tone suggested that, in a small way, she was reliving the gratifying experiences. Some of her positive stories were of personal memories such as how she and Jack took dancing lessons or travelled to one of many distant countries. Along with these personally satisfying memories were others that focused on past experiences with Lisa or other grandchildren. These stories included descriptions of Lisa and her sister on their granddad's motor scooter, their family boat trips and weekends playing cards with the grandchildren. Accounts like these were socially stimulating in that they were almost always followed by laughter and elaboration and clarification questions by Lisa who clearly seemed to enjoy the discussion as much as her grandmother.

Besides being predominantly life-affirming and positive, Elaine's stories also portrayed her in a complimentary and reinforcing light. As a character in her own stories Elaine was most often depicted as an independent free spirit with a

clear internal locus of control. This is likely how Elaine would like to see herself and how she would like her granddaughter to see and remember her. In one instance, Elaine took obvious pleasure in telling Lisa how she once overheard her then teenage son (Lisa's father), talking to a friend about how aware their mothers were about women's liberation. Elaine's son said, "I don't think my mom thinks much about it, but then, she was born liberated!" Then, on three different occasions during our conversations, Elaine mentioned how she does not "give a damn about what other people think" and although she "likes to be liked" she refuses to adjust her "standards" or "codes of behaviour" to suit others.

Although her stories never sounded self-aggrandizing, Elaine also enjoyed discussing the accomplishments she has achieved during her life. These included becoming a yoga instructor, understanding several languages and becoming learned in international history. Therefore, although Elaine believes that the subject matter of her stories was spontaneously chosen they did depict a very positive picture of her and the life she has lived to date. Moreover, the process of telling these stories certainly appeared to be a "fun" and psychologically satisfying experience for her.

Content Control (Social Factors)

Lisa, more than any other grandchild in this study, actively participated in the reminiscence conversations, making the process a dynamic and vital interaction. With Lisa's high level of participation, much of the content and direction of the conversations were strongly influenced by

her. Elaine purposefully chose Lisa as a reminiscence partner because of their close personal relationship and because she believed Lisa would be interested in her stories and able to understand and empathize with how she experienced them. The two womens' relationship and form of interaction then, significantly influenced the way Elaine experienced our conversations.

Although Elaine believes that she is not strongly influenced by the opinions of others she did want to ensure that her most meaningful memories were appreciated by her audience. Elaine suspects that most children or teenagers are not "really interested in family history" but some, like Lisa, become interested when they get older. She also stated that she would not have been as open in her reminiscences with other grandchildren because "there are some things that are too important" to Elaine "to discuss with them". One of the reasons Elaine asked Lisa to reminisce with her was because she thought that this grandchild would appreciate and value her important memories. Judging from the fluid and easy unfolding of the conversations, Elaine did choose a receptive and appreciative listener.

Even with Lisa as a listener, however, Elaine's concern about having her important memories appreciated and understood may have limited the content of her stories. In discussing how she "subconsciously" focused her stories on positive experiences Elaine stated that even if she would have consciously thought about painful events she would not have elaborated on them. Subjects such as Jack's long battle with cancer were avoided partly because she "wouldn't have wanted to make Lisa unhappy" but also because of Lisa's age and Elaine's belief that "at that age people don't have a concept

of that kind of loss". For Elaine then, a wish to avoid upsetting her granddaughter and her audience's ability to understand and appreciate her experiences were factors that determined the content of the stories she was prepared to tell. Her close relationship with Lisa enabled her to adopt a "free and easy" attitude about the content of her stories but her wish to make the experience a positive one for her granddaughter and the age and experiential discrepancy between the two women limited the content of the conversations and seemed to keep them focused on positive experiences.

One segment of our conversation contradicted the predominantly positive and life-affirming flavour of Elaine's expressed memories. This change in the narrative began when she stated her belief that, "When you look back everyone thinks of things they would have rather not done". Elaine then discussed some of the "inconsiderate" and "selfish" things she did as a young adult. These were relatively minor incidents such as refusing to share the telephone and demanding that her new husband not go to a golf tournament. Psychologically, this discussion of regrets appeared to have very little impact on Elaine because she claimed to have come to terms with her past behaviour. For Elaine, "what is done is done" and she has "learned from it" and that is "all" she can do. Socially however, the discussion of regrets was a covert message for Lisa designed to demonstrate that "sometimes the things we do when we are younger that seem perfectly alright, are not so great when we are older". More specifically, Elaine stated that Lisa is very similar to herself so she "can recognize the signs in Lisa" that suggest she may regret her current "dominant" behaviour in her marriage. The regrets Elaine discussed then, were not as much

an attempt at cathartic relief through personal disclosure as they were a warning, "a nudge" designed to lead Lisa to re-evaluate her behaviour. For Elaine then, part of the reminiscence activity was used as an opportunity to educate, persuade and unobtrusively influence her granddaughter.

Lisa's high level of interest and participation in the reminiscence activity meant that control over the focus of the conversations was shared between the two women. Being that the activity centred on Elaine's memories, it was usually easy for Elaine to choose the stories she wanted to tell and how she wished to tell them. In one instance, Elaine demonstrated her level of control by abruptly changing the focus of the conversation from a social interchange, based on a group of memories the two women shared, to a personal reflection on an experience she had with Jack. Here, as in many other instances throughout the conversations, Elaine's manner of referring to Jack highlighted the intended focus of the discussion. When Elaine focused on her personal memories she used the name "Jack" because that is how she knew him. But when the comment or story about Jack was primarily directed at Lisa, Elaine usually referred to him as "your granddad". And on a few occasions, when she seemed to be taking pride in Jack or his accomplishments, she called him "my husband". Besides frequently having command over the focus of the discussion, Elaine also moved the conversation easily from the past to the present and from a humorous to a serious demeanour.

While Elaine was the principle navigator of the conversations, Lisa was able to steer the discussions towards areas that interested her and away from subjects that seemed to make her uncomfortable. On three occasions Lisa abruptly changed subjects and thereby moved the discussion from unhappy

emotional issues, such as Elaine's regrets and Jack's last wishes, to more emotionally neutral topics like Elaine's classroom behaviour. Lisa also took control of the conversation when she halted a description, by Elaine, of a travel experience by asking her grandmother how she and Jack met and became a couple. This seemed to catch Elaine off guard, perhaps because she had met Jack while each of them were still married, and the three years between their meeting and marriage was a "rough" and rarely discussed period of her life. Lisa then supportively, but insistently, asked Elaine many clarification and elaboration questions around issues like the impact of the divorce on Elaine's family and friends and how she and Jack's children (including Lisa's father) reacted to the divorce and remarriage. Although Elaine seemed fully composed and prepared to describe these events, later she pointed to this discussion as partly the cause of the severe grief and sleeplessness she experienced. For Elaine then, the act of doing the reminiscence activity with her granddaughter as an active participant meant relinquishing some control over the conversation's direction. In this case, the lost control may have led to a discussion with disturbing repercussions for Elaine.

Although Lisa showed interest throughout our reminiscence conversations there were certain subjects of mutual interest that really sparked her enthusiasm and increased her level of participation. Because of the high level of interaction between the women, the conversations remained focused on these subjects of mutual interest for extended periods of time. In fact, when asked at the end of the reminiscence activity, to list the turning points in her life, Elaine understandably mentioned her relationship with

Jack but also the birth of her children, the birth of her grandchildren and the her first husband's job transfer - issues that she did not discuss during the reminiscence conversations. At least part of the reason for these omissions probably lies in the highly interactional nature of the conversations and the fact that so much time was spent on issues of mutual interest that other, perhaps more personally important memories, were missed. Often these favoured subject areas centered on memories that Elaine and Lisa shared and thus Lisa was invited to include her perspective of the events. These were all happy memories that usually described visits from Lisa to Elaine and Jack's home where they would stay for the weekend and boat, swim, go to plays, and play card games. Elaine found that "there are all sorts of things she can remember" about the "kids" and they were all "fun" memories that were a pleasure for Elaine and Lisa to discuss. In a few instances Lisa even surprised Elaine by remembering things that her grandmother had forgotten. For instance, Elaine broke into laughter when Lisa reminded her of the piggy bank her and Jack had on their refrigerator to collect travel money.

Another area of shared interest that was thoroughly discussed during the reminiscence activity was Elaine's school experiences. While Lisa obviously did not play a role in these memories she is currently studying to be a teacher and thus has strong opinions on the subject. In fact, having formal education in this field (Elaine has none) seemed to dramatically raise Lisa's confidence and authority on this issue. Lisa demonstrated her increased social confidence by actually leading Elaine to re-interpret some of her grade-school memories. In one case, Elaine recalled being strapped

for talking by a teacher who "warned her twice" and when she talked again Elaine clearly believed that she had "asked for it". But on two occasions during this description Lisa interjected and questioned "the teacher's ability to handle the class". Finally, when Lisa questioned the teacher's ability once again it was clear that the two women were negotiating the meaning of Elaine's memory. More specifically, they were negotiating where to place responsibility for the strapping with Lisa blaming the teacher and Elaine blaming herself. Finally, Elaine conceded somewhat and said to Lisa, "Very likely, when I look back on it now, but at that time I recognized that he had warned us and I had ignored the warning". In another instance, Elaine mentioned how she once confronted a teacher in class and Lisa felt confident enough to interpret her grandmother's and the teacher's thoughts during the incident. Lisa stated that her grandmother would have confronted the teacher "had there been thirty kids there or not, she [the teacher] thought you wanted all the attention and all the kids to look at her". One final example involved Lisa interpreting the impact an ineffective math teacher had on her grandmother. "He probably stifled a lot of the things you could do. You could never learn anything because he never taught you anything". In these three examples Lisa's formal education and expertise may have helped to authorize her to interpret and negotiate the meaning of Elaine's school memories. Moreover, Lisa is clearly a sympathetic interpreter in that her explications removed responsibility from Elaine and placed it on her grandmother's educators. For Elaine then, this was a situation in which a group of her memories were not only centred on an issue of mutual interest but they overlapped an area of her listener's

expertise. A situation then arose in which part of Elaine's authority to interpret her own past experiences was usurped and the meaning of her experiences became open for negotiation.

Lisa's influence on the content of Elaine's narrative then, was manifold. Elaine's concern over Lisa's ability to fully understand profound loss and her desire not to make Lisa unhappy with sorrowful memories were two influential factors. Furthermore, the close relationship between the two women and the highly interactive nature of their discussions, focused the conversations on issues of mutual interest and shared experiences. These factors also lead Elaine to share control over the conversation's direction and even the meaning of some of her memories with Lisa. This shared control may have led Elaine to discuss challenging issues she may not have been prepared to deal with and omit, from the conversations, other pivotal events in her life. Elaine also used the activity to warn Lisa away from making similar mistakes to those she made as a young woman.

"A Sense of Continuity"

One of the things Elaine believed our reminiscence conversations accomplished was that they helped to give Lisa more of a "sense of continuity" or a better idea of "how some things change and some don't in the way people live and the way they think". In providing this sense of continuity Elaine "filled in gaps" Lisa had concerning their family and concerning broad trends in social history. In terms of family continuity, Elaine enjoyed describing close family members but she also thought "it was important" to give Lisa "some idea of

what it was like in my childhood and what my parents were like so she had some idea of how things went in the background of family". One of Elaine's goals in this regard was to create a "picture of Lisa's great grandparent's because she never knew them". This, she said, "would not be important to do" had she been reminiscing with a contemporary. Elaine appeared to see a high level of inter-generational continuity between Lisa, herself and her mother. She mentioned on three occasions that she strongly regretted that Lisa "never had a chance to meet her great grandmother who she would have gotten on with very well".

Elaine also wanted to expand upon and detail Lisa's memories of Jack. This was indicated on our first meeting when Elaine began by discussing photographs from an album and the majority of the photo's that she pointed-out and described were either of Jack or included him. During these discussions, and others throughout our conversations, Elaine elaborately described Jack's character. She told a story in which Jack abruptly left the hospital, just before he was due to have a serious cancer operation, to make sure his volunteer work at Hospice was up to date. "He was that kind of person" Elaine told Lisa. Through other stories Elaine depicted Jack as a "considerate", independent and confident man. Other family members, living and deceased, were also briefly described but Jack and Lisa's great grandparents were the individuals who Elaine most wanted to portray in her effort to provide Lisa with a sense of family continuity.

Elaine used her keen interest and considerable knowledge in history, as well as her experience as a witness of history, to provide a sense of social continuity for Lisa. As was the case when she was providing family continuity, Elaine enjoyed

this process in a personal sense, because the topic is interesting to her, and in a social sense, because she believed she was "giving" something of worth to Lisa. Elaine believes that there is considerable "value" in her knowledge and experience in history. Beliefs which have been fostered by previous requests for historical interviews and her own love of history as a subject area. The reminiscence interview then, created a context that invited Elaine to share and explore her valuable historical insights and enjoy the prestige associated with being present during periods in history when important events took place. On several occasions she used her age and experience to establish personal authority and add credibility to her historical opinions. In one instance the two women were discussing the changes in the roles of women and Elaine pointed out that "people my age, in their seventies and older have seen a tremendous change in social outlook". In another case the conversation focused on the rapid development of communication media and Elaine mentioned that she was "of the generation in which T.V. was practically a miracle, well, even radio". She went on to say that she could remember "Victoria's first radio station" and "the very first" broadcast of the Metropolitan Opera on the air. Although in the context of this conversation these experiences were important, at the time, Elaine said she "wasn't much into it". Lisa thought it was strange that she would remember these events so well when at the time she "barely noticed". It seems that the reminiscence activity enabled Elaine to rediscover and appreciate, perhaps for the first time, the significance of a past experience. In this case the memory provided credibility to Elaine and her insights concerning continuity and change in social history.

One example of a conversation aimed at providing Lisa with a sense of historical continuity began with a memory of the old western films and quickly evolved into a discussion on the history of racism. In this example, Elaine addressed both family and social continuity by documenting the subtle changes in racial outlook through the thoughts and behaviour of three generations of family members. This description included a depiction of the indirect prejudices expressed by Elaine's "open minded" parents and ended with an exploration of the differences in the way Elaine and Lisa view the issue of racism. Lisa mentioned that she disagreed with her grandmother's opinion that it is alright to ask people with different skin colour where they are from. While Elaine might ask out of innocent curiosity, Lisa believes that it is rude to assume someone is not from Canada just because their skin colour is not white. Certainly in this instance then, Lisa was able to see the continuity in familial racial attitudes and perhaps even place her grandmother and herself on an evolutionary continuum. Other issues such as women's liberation and the changes in family attitudes were also discussed leading Elaine to say "it's amazing how one's judgement changes as you learn about people". This statement underlines the fact that personal growth and discovery, along with a feeling of social contribution, were parts of her experience of discussing these social issues.

Part of Elaine's experience of our reminiscence conversations then, was an attempt to provide Lisa with a sense of family and social continuity that illustrates how members of her family and society have changed and stayed the same over time. She focused her family descriptions on those whom she was closest to and her social history discussions on

issues that interested her. Besides being personally enjoyable this process of creating continuity also seemed to be socially validating in that it contributed something of perceived value to Lisa and transformed Elaine's advanced age and experience from a social liability to a strength.

Summary

Elaine's experience of the reminiscence activity included a delayed but powerful "stab of grief" and regret over the loss of her partner and the loss of the large part of her life that he represented. This reaction was surprising because Elaine enjoyed the conversations about Jack during the activity and the stories she told about him were almost all positive in nature. Although Elaine believed her choice of memories to be spontaneous, her stories did follow a pattern depicting her and her life in a positive and complimentary manner. In a psychological sense, the process of telling life-affirming stories was an enjoyable and validating one for Elaine. Socially, the close relationship between the two women and the highly interactive nature of their discussions, focused the conversations on issues of mutual interest and shared experiences. These factors also lead Elaine to share control over the conversation's direction and even the meaning of some of her memories with Lisa. Elaine also used the activity to warn Lisa away from making similar mistakes to those she made as a young woman. Finally, Elaine enjoyed, and seemed empowered by, the process of describing loved family members and discussing important social issues in order to give Lisa a sense of continuity concerning how people change and stay the same over time.

Gladys and Michele

Gladys is a seventy-two year old woman who lives with her first husband Cec in the house they built themselves in Saanich. Her twenty two year old granddaughter Michele joined Gladys and myself for the reminiscence conversations. Although Gladys has a severe physical disability which limits her mobility, she remains very engaged in domestic activities, travelling, and especially family events. Gladys and Michele enjoy a very close relationship which reflects the intimate nature of their family as a whole. The tone of the two reminiscence conversations was relaxed and informal and the women appeared to interact in a natural and familiar way.

I Wish Those Days Would Just Come Back

Early during our first reminiscence conversation Gladys explained that she believed "everything was so much better" in the past "than what it is today". She remembers the "old days" as being far safer than today. "In those days you didn't have to worry about anybody mugging you", and "you weren't afraid to walk down the street alone". Compared to when she was young, Gladys believes that "there is nothing for kids" to do these days and "the kids today" would not be "satisfied" with the entertainment she once enjoyed. "They just want to get into all kinds of mischief". For Gladys, the past was clearly a better time to be a "kid" and youth in general were happier and better behaved. This general belief may well have invited Gladys to emphasis how enjoyable her own past was. Her glowing stories about such things as dancing, roller skating and meeting friends at the local cafe seemed to help create, or reinforce, a pleasing picture of her childhood

which seemed to be pleasant for her to tell and enjoyable for Michele to hear.

Gladys' process of praising the past in comparison with the present was complicated by the presence of Michele who was recently a youth herself and clearly does not fit Gladys' unflattering stereotype. The contradiction between Michele and Gladys' image of today's youth appeared to make Gladys unsure of her assumptions and seek confirmation of her beliefs by finishing her comments about today's youth with phrases like "I think", "is there"? or "would they"? This tension seemed particularly evident when Gladys stated that youth only want to "get into mischief" and paused, looked at Michele and said "but not these kids". Michele was "a really good girl when she was growing up". Although Michele's presence seemed to make Gladys less certain about her own negative assumptions concerning today's youth, her fear and uncertainty about current youth culture remained evident throughout our conversations and likely helped her to view her own youth in a relatively positive way.

The fact that Gladys views the world of her past as being a better place than the world today helps explain why she found her experience of revisiting the past so "enjoyable". After discussing one particularly happy memory, Gladys stated, "I wish those days could just come back, just start and see those days again". Then, after admitting that "life isn't like that", she seemed to find solace in realizing "that just thinking about [those days] and remembering them means a lot too". Gladys also equates her experience of remembering past events with "reliving" them. For her, the activity was a positive experience because, as Gladys states, "I could relive my memories of what the different parts of my

life were like". Moreover, these relived parts of life were historically situated in more positively perceived periods of time helping to make the narrative an affirmative one.

Besides revisiting and reliving the experiences in her past, Gladys also enjoyed the reminiscence experience because it gave her a chance to put the different parts of her life together. "Normally", Gladys "might occasionally look at a few photos" and reminisce but she found it "very enjoyable... remembering all the different parts which you don't usually do". For Gladys then, the reminiscence, experience seemed to be a unique and rewarding journey that enabled her to return to a better time and use her memory to relive and unite the different parts of her life. By the end of our conversations Gladys believed that she had created a comprehensive and cohesive self-narrative.

"My best memories"

In concordance with her belief that the past was a better time to live, Gladys primarily focused her reminiscences on positive, life-affirming memories. This positive focus was indicated by Gladys' first few words of our initial conversation in which she stated that her "best memories were from seventeen years old and up" and she immediately began describing that happy period. Moreover, Gladys' final sentence indicates that she maintained this generally positive orientation throughout the two reminiscence discussions. She concluded by stating, "I think that has covered most of our happy times in my growing up years and since I have been married". Gladys' emphasis in selecting memories clearly seemed to favour the "happy times" and "best memories". These

positive stories generally depicted her in a complimentary way and described her life as active, exciting and socially rewarding.

It seemed particularly important for Gladys to remember and describe times when she was physically active. Although she has severe rheumatoid arthritis in her hips, psychologically Gladys does not "feel crippled" or "any differently" than she did "thirty or forty years ago". Although she knows she cannot be as active as she once was, the reminiscence activity "jogged" her "memory into thinking about all those active times [she] used to have". Gladys clearly relished the experience of describing the days when dancing was her "whole life". In those days no matter what the band was "playing at the time", when she walked in to her regular dance hall they would "stop and strike up 'Elmer's Tune'", which everyone knew was her favourite song. Then, on three separate occasions during our conversations, she mentioned how much she "loved sports" and listed all the teams she played for. Gladys "lived for" field-hockey and she took pleasure in describing the time when the coach visited her mother and "begged her" to let Gladys play in the championship game. She also told stories of playing cricket, basketball and roller-skating in every arena in the city. It clearly seemed to be personally validating for Gladys to remember and relive these active times. It may also have been important for her to tell these stories and show Michele that she was once just as healthy and active as her granddaughter is today.

Other positive stories Gladys told depicted her life as thrilling and exciting. Again these stories were likely chosen for her own satisfaction and also perhaps for the pleasing picture they portrayed to her audience. These

entertaining memories included descriptions of how she and her husband (then boyfriend), would get into mischief and adventures while they were dating. Another story described a night when Gladys had agreed to date two different Navy men. Still others described some of the "horrible storms" and close calls she has had while boating with her husband Cec. As she claimed on several occasions, "we have had some exciting times" and it appeared to be satisfying for her to remember these times and tell Michele and myself about them.

Another category of "best" memories Gladys discussed involved regular outings with family members. Gladys described these family oriented memories for a longer period of time than all other memories and the emotional tone of her voice during this dialogue suggests that they were very meaningful times for her. Most of these stories centred on the trips she took as a child with her extended family to Qualicum Beach every summer and Elk Lake every Saturday. Several other positive stories came from her descriptions of other family camping trips in various locations on Vancouver Island. These very positive family oriented stories will be discussed in more detail later but their importance and positive nature are probably major reasons why the reminiscence activity was gratifying for Gladys.

In our conversations Gladys also told many stories that portrayed her personally in a complimentary manner. The stories she chose to tell about her grade school experience, for instance, depicted her athleticism and the success of her field-hockey team as well as how she loved spelling because she usually won the school spelling bee. She also described herself as the child who "generally helped [her] parents more" than her siblings by stacking wood for her father and

sacrificing her education to look after her brother so her mother could work. Gladys also told a story about how, when she was in hospital, a nurse took her aside and called her "the most sensible one" in the ward and asked her to befriend a needy patient. Other stories described her overcoming difficult challenges and being the one other family members called for when they were in need. These stories were likely memorable because they once bolstered Gladys' self-esteem and it seems likely that the act of remembering and discussing these validating memories was in itself psychologically reinforcing. As with the other positive stories, these may also have been socially pleasing for Gladys in terms of the complimentary picture they portrayed to Michele.

Gladys' process of remembering, telling and to some degree reliving these positive memories seemed to have led her to positively re-evaluate her early life. Very early on in our conversations she seemed to disregard her childhood and referred to it as a period of "rough growing up years" not suitable for the positive conversations she intended to have. In fact, her first comments of the reminiscence activity indicated that she "couldn't remember much as a child really" and her best memories occurred after the age of seventeen. After several minutes of conversation, Gladys revealed that she regretted the fact that she "had to quit school and stay at home to look after [her] brother". With this regret out of the way Gladys seemed free to discuss life-affirming childhood events and enjoyable times she spent on teams, with friends and particularly with her family. After describing how enjoyable the family trips to Qualicum Beach were, she declared that "those were the happiest years of my life, the happiest". Then, after talking about the wonderful family

grief. When the doctor suggested hospitalization to Gladys,

I said no, because then I wouldn't have any of my family around me at all. And after a few days I said, gee whiz, I have two more kids I have to think about, I have to snap out of it. So that got me thinking, smarten up.

The family itself offered healing gestures that reflect the caring and intimate nature of this group. Gladys' surviving son, Ron, was named after her brother who was also killed by an automobile at a very young age. Then, when Ron became an adult he named his first son Wayne and thus both lost boys, in name and memory, were re-born into the family. Gladys then, was able to remember how she drew on one of her primary strengths, her love of her family, to pull her self out of despair and back into her active life where she was needed.

Gladys also discussed the personal coping strategies she uses to deal with this loss which are based on cognitive thought control. As she explained, she does not "block the memory of our little guy out of my mind, just what happened that day". And while she loves to think about Wayne, she knows, "that a person could go almost out of their mind to dwell on it for very long". Gladys' use of descriptors such as "got it", "sad parts", "what happened" and "different things" to portray Wayne's death suggest that she is successful in blocking out the details of his accident by replacing them with more ambiguous terms that probably cause her less grief.

While Gladys indicated that her family has also been supportive in her efforts to cope with her arthritis she seems to see this loss as more of an individual challenge. She employs similar personal coping strategies in dealing with her disability to those used in coping with her son's death.

Gladys again indicated the importance of thought control when she stated, "a person could sit around and go mental if they just thought about it for too long". For a time in her past she did find herself, "coming to tears" over her disability but she is no longer overcome by the loss and as she says, "it is just a way of life for me now". Gladys seems to take pride in the fact that she has not "let it slow [her] down" and it is this staunch determination to carry on despite the discomfort and inconvenience that she attributes to keeping her "mentality alive".

The greatest help Gladys' family has provided is in acknowledging that she does not "want people to feel sorry for [her]" and thus, see her disability like she does, as simply part of her way of life. They also participate in celebrating Gladys' bold determination not to let the arthritis get in her way by continuing to tell classic family stories (such as Gladys' amazingly fast escape from the car) that highlight these strengths. The reminiscence activity then, has enabled Gladys to articulate how she has overcome the great losses in her life. How she has controlled her thoughts and memories and accessed the strength of her family to face her misfortunes and integrate them into her own way of life.

Summary

Like the other participants in this study, Gladys reported finding our reminiscence conversations interesting and enjoyable. Her uncertainty about today's culture has led her to believe that the world she grew up in was a better place to live in than the world today. This belief seems to have invited her to focus on the positive stories in her past

which depict her in a complimentary way and describe her life as active, exciting and socially rewarding. The act of re-telling, and to some extent reliving, these positive memories appeared to lead Gladys to re-evaluate her early life in an affirmative way.

In a social sense, Gladys' enjoyment of the reminiscence conversations can be partly explained by the pleasure she feels simply by being in her granddaughter's company. For Gladys, Michele is both a close friend and a representative of an extremely intimate family system.

Gladys' stories indicated that throughout her development she took part in regular, even ritualized, activities with the social groups that seemed particularly meaningful to her at various times. Through the reminiscence process, she appeared to be able to access feelings of belonging and personal and social harmony that she may have felt during these regular events. Gladys also told many stories that were clearly well known family classics and the act of telling these stories appeared to be a traditional family event in itself. Her enjoyment in relating these stories seemed to come from the familiarity of the tales and the joyful recognition they produced.

Gladys also seemed to enjoy telling Michele about the English branch of their family she and Cec had connected with and the exhilarating experience of returning to her native England. Finally, Gladys appeared to take pride in describing to Michele the personal strategies and family help that has enabled her to overcome the difficult losses she has experienced in her lifetime.

Jean and Nicole

Jean is a seventy-four year old widow who lives alone and enjoys a very active lifestyle. She has volunteered in the community for several years and is emotionally close and engaged with her family. Jean and Nicole, her twenty year old granddaughter, have a close relationship in which Jean "keeps an open mind" and rarely judges and Nicole enjoys the room Jean gives her to be herself. Nicole also clearly respects her grandmother and values her opinions. Both women appeared to be relaxed and interacted naturally throughout our conversations.

Concern About the Reception of Her Stories

During our discourse it became apparent that Jean notices and places high value on the opinions she believes others have of her. As Jean reminisced she twice described being concerned about "sticking out like a sore thumb" because of her unusual last name and being a Canadian living in a prairie town populated mostly by Americans. She "didn't want to be different" from those around her and she worried about being seen as a "foreigner".

The distinct social consciousness revealed in Jean's reminiscences was also reflected in her apprehension over how Nicole would feel about listening to her life stories. Jean described her granddaughter as a "complex person" whom she does not fully understand and so was "wondering what she was thinking" in regards to the reminiscence activity. Jean feared that she sounded like "one of those people who tell the same old stories over and over again until you scream". Jean also expressed concern that a great deal of her life, and

therefore the stories of her life, would seem quite dull. She was almost apologetic when she twice mentioned that she "never used to do much except go to work and come home and go to work". Her obvious concern about Nicole being "bored" by the experience suggests that Nicole's reactions were a very important factor in determining Jean's experience of the reminiscence activity. As we will see later, Jean's interest in the reception of her stories greatly influenced the stories she told and the way in which she told them.

Jean was pleased to report feeling "reinforced" and validated by Nicole's perceived interest and participation in the reminiscence conversations. Nicole's verbal interactions were usually short and focused on finding out factual details such as names and dates or adding detail to stories that involved Nicole or her parents. Nicole also commented as a representative of the younger generation when Jean compared past and present living conditions. But more important than her contributions to the content of Jean's stories was the attention and clear interest Nicole showed in her grandmother's life through non verbal and subtle means. She maintained a high level of eye contact, alert posturing, and constantly acknowledged Jean through her use of uh huh's, smiles and laughter.

With her acute social consciousness and concerns about Nicole's reaction to her stories, Jean clearly seemed gratified and reinforced by Nicole's interest and participation in the activity. She described Nicole as sometimes not being an attentive listener but this time she was "taking it all in" and "enjoying it so much." What Jean enjoyed was Nicole's "reaction" to her, the fact that "she liked to hear about [her] life". This perception of interest

and enjoyment from her granddaughter may have invited Jean to re-construe her beliefs concerning how interesting her life has been. Nicole's level of engagement lead Jean to consider that maybe "all my stories are not boring". Jean was impressed that even the stories that Nicole had heard before were of interest, "so I guess they are not that dull". Nicole's interest then, seemed to socially validated Jean's life stories and led her to feel "good", "encouraged" and "flattered" about herself and the way she has lived her life.

Besides this personal validation, Nicole's noticeable interest in Jean's memories strengthened the social relationship between the two women. Jean clearly appeared to enjoy "sharing" her memories with someone who would enjoy them with her. When asked if feeling "flattered" by Nicole's interest was the most pronounced feeling she experienced, Jean stated that it was actually "the feeling of closeness...that she was interested in what I had to say". By being truly present for her grandmother, Nicole validated Jean's life stories and life experiences and simultaneously strengthened the social bond between her and her grandmother.

Story Content Management (Editing)

When describing what her reminiscence experience was like, one of the first things Jean said was that she "really only cared to remember" the "enjoyable memories that indicate a fun and interesting past". Jean clearly controlled and monitored the content of the stories she told and in the following quote she indicates some of the personal and social reasons for this behaviour.

Yeah, well most people don't want to hear about all that negative stuff anyway, I think. It's morbid, those times in life you weren't happy about. And if you keep talking about it it gets worse too. You kind of are dwelling on it and dwelling on it.

Jean's concern about what people want to hear reflects her level of social consciousness and her apprehension over the reception of her stories. Moreover, Jean twice mentioned how her children get "angry" at her when she describes the "difficult parts" of her life. Emphasizing negative memories then, may mean breaking a family norm and perhaps lead her audience to lose interest in her stories. From a psychological perspective, indifference or boredom from Nicole may have had the effect of reinforcing Jean's fear that her stories, and indeed life, was of little interest. The quote also reflects Jean's belief that by focusing on negative memories the feelings associated with them worsen.

Jean, however, did not totally avoid her painful memories nor does she believe that this is the proper course of action. Although Jean seemed to believe that talking about difficult memories is a social liability and dwelling on them is psychologically damaging, she managed to find a middle ground in which she "touched on" and acknowledged these experiences without making them the centre of conversation. For instance, she made her feelings of resentment towards her father clear when she curtly described herself as being "pawned off" and later "farmed out" after her mother's death. With the exception of two cases these allusions to distressing past events were always short and usually couched in depictions of pleasant stories and close relationships. The death of Jean's first husband and the years she spent with an abusive step

mother, however, were negative episodes too pivotal in her life story to simply mention - although her depiction of even these events was brief and gave no hint of self pity. The first time she mentioned her first husband's death Jean described how "he died in the last week of the war," then she seemed to catch herself in the midst of a sorrowful depiction and ended the statement with, "but you can't change that now". Similarly, when mentioning her mistreatment at the hands of her stepmother, Jean concluded her remarks with, "it's all gone and you can't change it". It seemed important for Jean to show her listeners, and perhaps herself, that she is not afraid to acknowledge her hardships but neither is she prepared to dwell on them.

Through all of her care not to emphasize her distressing memories Jean did find the process of openly acknowledging them therapeutic. After again describing how her daughters dislike hearing any of her painful life stories Jean likened the experience of mentioning these stories during our reminiscence conversations to "the Catholics during confession". "It gets it out....and off my chest".

Some people that have something and they keep it bottled up but if you tell someone then 'bup' and it doesn't bother you as much any more. At least that's the way it is with me.

Although her family norms may have lead Jean to believe that these difficult memories are things "most people do not want to hear" she still took the opportunity to acknowledge them and enjoy the psychological benefits of this action.

Although Jean's painful memories play an important part in her reminiscence experience the funny, delightful and life affirming stories make up an overwhelming majority of the text. Jean considers her positive rendition of her life story

to be "the truth all right but it's told in a little different way. You leave out the unpleasant or unnecessary things". Focusing on the positive aspects of life does more than simply give Jean's audience what she believes they want to hear; it also reflects her belief that "you can't change what has happened but you can change how you feel about it". This statement was mentioned three times in our conversations and acts as a guiding principle in Jean's life. It also had a strong influence on how she constructed, told and experienced her life story. Jean realizes she can change the way she feels about her past and that is why, she states, "I was making it sound as if it was all fine". For Jean, "if you tell it like that often enough you believe it yourself". The predominance of life affirming stories in Jean's reminiscences then, served the social purpose of providing the stories she believed her audience wanted to hear and the psychological purpose of helping her to reconstruct and brighten the way she feels about the events of her life.

This process of changing the way she feels about her past by focusing on the positive memories is evident throughout the text of our conversations. Almost every positive story Jean told reflected well on her and gave her reason to feel proud of the things she identifies with, whether these things concern her personal life, her family, the region she grew up in or her ancestry.

The great majority of Jean's positive memories focused on her relationships with family and loved ones. One of the happiest chapters in Jean's life story centres on the three years she spent with her first husband, Bud. When describing this time in her life Jean smiled often and her narrative never wandered to other subjects or time periods as it was

prone to do in other parts of our conversations. She described with obvious pride the day Bud received his officer's commission and how she used to "love to walk right down Young Street and make all the soldiers salute him". She said, half jokingly, that she "practically got him that commission by being friendly with the C.O's wife". Although this golden age lasted only three years in chronological time, for Jean, it now seems to be a much larger portion of her life in terms of 'lived time'. While trying to comprehend how much time had passed since Bud's death Jean states that she "can't believe that it was fifty years ago...it doesn't seem that long ago at all". This is likely because although their time together was very brief she has "all those very happy memories to keep me" and she revisits them often thus expanding the lived time of their relationship. Indeed it is Jean's lived time and not chronological time that is reflected by the life story she told. And in this story, the painful periods are shorter and the happy times far longer than their actual historical duration.

Just as she took pride and gratification in describing her relationship with Bud, Jean also celebrates her important roles in the lives of other family members. These stories range from having to tell her teenage daughter's boyfriend's parents that they were about to become grandparents, to "being there" for all her grandson's hockey and baseball games and practises. Jean clearly seems to have found a role as the matriarch of her family and she takes great pride in describing her importance in family relationships.

One matriarchal role that the reminiscence experience enabled Jean to act out was that of the family history bearer. On four occasions Jean's reminiscences branched out from her

own past experiences and generalised to the life stories of other important family members. Jean richly described many of her father's life stories such as his early homesteading days and his career as a baseball player. She also recounted stories from the life of her daughter Patty, Nicole's mother. Her most thorough and heartfelt description, however, was saved for her first husband Bud's life story. This narrative began with his birth in England and depicted Bud's home-life, his education and training, his relationship with his parents and finally his relationship with Jean just before his death. In the cases of her father and Bud these brief histories were celebrations, from Jean, for two people she loved and who are unable to tell their own stories. It was also clear that these renditions were positively oriented (like the stories of her own past) and that telling them made Jean feel proud of the subjects and gratified herself for having used this opportunity to remember and tell their story.

Jean's stories were also full of praise for the geographic locations in which she was raised. It is clear that part of the wholesome goodness Jean recalls about "prairie life" she sees in herself. When her mother was terminally ill and her father had to go to the city to be with her, the neighbouring farmers cut and threshed his crop. "If you were in trouble they were always there to help...that's just the way things worked". That Jean has deeply integrated this ethic into her personal philosophy is shown by her view of religion: "My religion is really helping someone else. I get more pleasure out of giving and helping someone and them not saying anything and I don't say anything either". Jean is also proud of her basic and "concentrated" Alberta education which served her well when she worked in Toronto and knew more

useful information than her senior colleagues educated in the East. Unlike Western Canada, Jean remembers Toronto as a place where "people don't talk to one another" and she vividly remembered breaking into tears when hearing "Spring Time in the Rockies" on the radio while living there.

Jean also reached beyond her own memories and those of her family members to tell stories that honoured her ancestors. It was clearly a pleasure for Jean to explain how "proud" she was about how "just a handful of Canadian farmers held off the Americans" in the War of 1812. She also praised her "Scottish ancestors" who fought the expansionistic aspirations of the Irish Finians and Jean proudly told their rallying call: "They may take Canada but they neih take the Sora". These stories that focus on the virtues of Jean's family members, loved ones, region and ancestry reflect well on Jean's life and may help her to feel good about her choices and "the way things have gone" for her. They also reveal that she has taken this opportunity to explore and express who she is in terms of the people, places and events that define her identity.

Humour: "Icing on the Cake"

The social and personal reasons that influenced Jean's selection of stories to tell also affected the way in which she told them. Just as Jean had left out many of the "unpleasant things" to portray a positive and interesting life story she also "added a little spice" to her stories and made them her "own version". Jean characterized this process as "putting the icing on the cake" and if the agreeable choice of stories is characterized by the cake then her humorous and

entertaining renditions of them represents the icing. Indeed the text of our conversations is peppered with jokes and ironies highlighted by Jean's own laughter. Part of the reason for the humorous depiction of many of her stories lies in her desire to tell an interesting and positive narrative for the enjoyment of her audience and for her own personal life evaluation. Nicole reinforced Jean's use of humour by laughing, commenting and generally engaging in the conversation more actively in the humorous portions of the story than the more serious ones. This was particularly evident when Jean described some of the amusing and mischievous behaviour she took part in at school and at work. Nicole's heightened interest during this portion of the narrative indicated her amusement and thus satisfied Jean's desire to maintain Nicole's interest and show Nicole that she "wasn't always old".

Jean's humour is also a part of an important personal life strategy in which she emphasizes the positive and humorous aspects of life - especially when life is challenging. As Jean puts it, "I have always tried to look at the positive side of things with my sense of humour". When Jean feels anxious or distraught she "tries to laugh it off" and she often used her humour during our reminiscence conversations to temper the painful sections of her story. This was indicated most clearly by her descriptions of her abusive step-mother who makes "Cinderella's step-mother look like the Fairy-godmother". Jean also related a story of how she told her grandsons that a huge patch of burned grass in a field is where they had strewn her step-mother's ashes. "At least I can laugh about it", Jean says and this makes her feel like "it's not such a big deal any more".

Although the physical and mental deterioration often associated with aging concerned her greatly, Jean also made fun of her advancing age. This was the case when she described shouting, "Do you think I'm old and feeble?" to a man who offered to help her to a chair at a government office. She also laughed and depicted her classmates at a recent reunion as "the boys I once thought were so great" who "now have bald heads and big pilsner tumours". She then smiled and said, "I wonder if they were saying the same thing about me too?"

Near the end of our last interview Jean explained how much she loved the British sense of humour and described how, during the war, the British were down in the subway during an air raid and an air-raid warden asked if there were any pregnant women down there. One man shouted, "have a heart governor we have only been down here for five minutes". This joke portrays an extremely traumatic time in which one person is strong and brave enough to see and share the humorous side of the situation. Jean used her sense of humour in this way during the reminiscence activity. Jean's humour then, made her stories more compelling to Nicole and enabled her to portray the lighter side of her darker memories and with her laughter demonstrate that she has power and control over her feelings concerning these events.

Coming to Grips with the Passage of Time

The very act of providing a detailed account of one's life story can lead the reminiscer to confront the enormous amount and pace of change in their world. Certainly a part of Jean's reminiscence experience centered on her efforts to come

to grips with the changes associated with the passage of time. Throughout the two reminiscence interviews her temporal focus constantly fluctuated from the past to the present and back again as she compared and contrasted her early years with the current period. Jean wondered at the rise in the price of beer, the "unimaginable" increase in salaries, the advent of income tax and the arrival of more casual dress codes. Her struggle to accept and integrate these changes was usually revealed by an expression of amazement followed by comments like, "but everything is relative", "things change" or "time sure flies".

At one point the assumptions Jean had about the nature of historical changes contradicted the content of the stories she told. Jean's efforts to integrate these two opposed sets of data revealed a process in which she reworked and reconstructed her beliefs about the past to reflect her actual memories. Jean compared school in the old days, when she could "not recall any discipline problems," with school today, stating that she would not be a teacher today "because of all the abuse you have to take". Then she proceeded to tell several entertaining stories describing how she and her friends teased and tormented their principal and each other at school. This contradiction highlights Jean's process of choosing interesting and entertaining stories to tell her audience and the fact that her assumptions about the difference between the past and present may be flawed. After reminiscing for some time on her early school days, Jean seemed to become cognizant of the contradiction and tempered her idealized depiction of the school system of her past. She did this by mentioning how she was once unjustly strapped and how her principal was hired only because "they wouldn't hire

a female principal in those days". "Things have changed now", she said, which seems to indicate that, for Jean, much about school today has actually improved.

Jean strongly identifies with her childhood home in the Alberta prairies and the changes to that region's landscape have deeply affected her. After discussing her childhood years in Edmonton, Jean compared the old town with the new city where they have "torn down so many things and put so many buildings up that... unless I look at the street signs I don't know where I am. I used to know without the signs". After a period of reminiscence, Jean describes the same disorientation when visiting Calgary again, and to a lesser extent, all of the Alberta prairies. She lamented the disappearance of the grain elevators that once stood as landmarks revealing the location of the next town and its level of prosperity. Gone too are the trains that once blew their whistles so regularly that, as a school girl, Jean would use the noise to signal the end of recess and lunch hour. The prairies of Jean's childhood are inscribed on her identity and her frequent transitions from reminiscing to comparing the past with the present show that the landscape she grew up in has fundamentally changed. The disappearance of this landscape, with the passage of time, highlights the impermanence of the human condition and, for Jean, may underline her own mortality.

While the changes in Jean's temporal focus signalled her efforts to integrate the changes highlighted by the reminiscence process they may also have served the social function of helping to keep Nicole interested and engaged in the conversation. This was the case when Jean finished a lengthy description of her career life and mentioned how easy

it was to get a job after the war. She then characteristically compared those days with today by saying, "It's not that way now. Things change". She then paused, looked at Nicole, and successfully drew her into the conversation by changing the subject to how "Nicole's mother" (not Emily as she is usually referred to) might buy a computer. These social and psychological reasons for returning to the present were again shown when, after reminiscing about the importance of trains in her childhood, Jean stated, "I keep thinking sometimes that we lived better and we were happier but I don't know". Jean then glanced at Nicole and concluded that "kids" today "wouldn't think that was any kind of life at all". Nicole, understanding that the statement was directed at her as well as the complexity of the comparison, replied that "it's hard to tell". Then, after a lengthy period of reminiscing about her first husband, Jean's discussion moved into the present and engaged Nicole by using her presence as an aid in coming to grips with the passage of time. Jean wonders how it could possibly have been fifty years since her first husband's death. "It doesn't seem that long ago but it has been. You can see Nicole here, she is my granddaughter from my second marriage". Nicole, as a granddaughter then, acts as a referent or representative of the present period which seemed to aid Jean in acknowledging and perhaps accepting historical changes.

The temporal fluctuations found throughout Jean's narrative indicate that the reminiscence experience has led her to confront the disorienting pace of change in her world. Jean's attempts to make sense and meaning out of these changes has led her to re-access and perhaps re-work assumptions about the past and has created an opportunity for Jean to re-engage

Nicole by including her in the conversation and reminiscence process.

Summary

When asking Jean how she experienced our reminiscence conversations she said, "it was like reliving your life" which was "fun" and "enjoyable" to do. To account for this predominantly positive evaluation of the experience, it is helpful to recall how concerned Jean was about how her life stories would be received by Nicole. To increase the likelihood that Nicole would find her stories interesting, Jean controlled the content of her narratives by choosing to describe mostly life affirming memories; she added humour and emphasized the positive aspects of the chosen stories; and she regularly returned to the present and enlisted Nicole's help in dealing with the changes in the world around her. Throughout the reminiscence activity these social strategies were constantly being reinforced by verbal and non verbal cues given by Nicole that indicated her keen interest in Jean's life story. For Jean, the experience lead to an increased feeling of closeness to Nicole and a strengthening of their relationship.

On a more personal psychological level, the apprehension Jean felt about the reception of her stories may have reflected her fear that her life was quite dull and uneventful. Nicole's perceived interest challenged these fears and invited Jean to re-construct her beliefs about her life. In an attempt to change the way she feels about her past life Jean controlled the content of her stories and emphasized the positive and humorous aspects of her accounts

(because if you tell them like that often enough you believe it yourself). Jean also found therapeutic benefit in acknowledging the difficult experiences in her life and expressed her power over these events through these acknowledgements and the use of humour. Finally, Jean used the reminiscence activity to acknowledge and integrate the many changes in the world around her.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

After applying the previously described methodology to the transcribed conversations and interviews I revisited and re-read the pertinent literature on reminiscence, reminiscence therapy, the self, narrative structures and grandparenthood. Through this re-emersion process I was able to connect a theoretical vocabulary to my understanding of the participants' experiences. At the same time, I took great care not to naively buy into a single theoretical perspective without going back to the transcriptions and asking if the perspective in question was really congruent with the data. I also explored the themes I had isolated and compared and contrasted them while constantly asking myself what do these themes and their relationships tell me about how this group of elders experienced these reminiscence conversations. The discussion that follows then, is generally a look at some of the important and often shared ways these elders experienced the reminiscence conversations with their grandchildren. The first section of the discussion is primarily, though not exclusively, centered on the aspects of the participants' experience that involve them as individuals. The second part of the discussion centres on the influence of the participants' grandchildren (and social context in general) on their experience of the conversations.

Part One: Personal Experiences

Earlier I stated that I agreed with the majority of contemporary social researchers who view self-narratives, and

the smaller stories of which they are comprised, to be unstable, selective and interpretive constructions and not accurate, photographic accounts of past experiences. The participants in this study reinforced this position by indicating that, to some degree, they all managed and shaped the stories they told during our conversations. Don was able to articulate many of the issues and questions that lead him, and perhaps the other participants, to shape and construct his narrative in a particular way.

To what extent should I display my life to anyone?
To what degree of intimacy, to what degree of
confidentiality...how interested are people
really?"

While all the participants dealt with questions like these in their own individual ways, patterns of similar responses did emerge in the combined text of our conversations.

Positive Memories

The most clearly defined and uniformly expressed manner in which the grandparent participants shaped their stories took the form of a positive bias in the content and style of their narratives. Although this form of narrative control was shared, the degree to which this positive emphasis was purposeful varied amongst the participants. Don and Jean made it clear from the start that they "prefer to remember the beautiful things" and their choice of stories and style of presentation conclusively reflected this inclination. Conversely, Elaine only recognized this tendency late in our last conversation and she attributed it to an "unconscious" desire to avoid discussing "the tough times". Gladys' never overtly admitted that she preferred a positive focus but

statements she made during our conversations clearly indicated that she consciously, or unconsciously, focused her memories on "the happy times". Jerold Starr (1983) reflected on this range of intentionality when he stated that while much of the "self-creation and re-creation" that happens when one constructs their life story takes place in "half awareness" many reconstructions "are specifically designed to omit references to, or conceal, past deeds that discredit a new presentation of self" (p. 263). Starr and other authors (Tarman, 1988; Goffman, 1950) might argue that the control and management of self narratives, conscious or otherwise, is part of an effort by the reminiscer to produce a personally and socially acceptable story. One effectual way to view the positive orientation of the self-narratives produced in this study is to consider that it is impossible to create a self-narrative without also creating a version of one's self. In the context of this study, and in the presence of myself and a grandchild, the grandparents clearly created selves and lives which were life-affirming and decidedly positive in orientation.

While all the narratives told by the participants tended to support the conclusion that the reminiscers had lived "a pretty happy life in general", the types of positive descriptions were wide ranging. These descriptions included complimentary self depictions, renditions of their lives that emphasised their loving relationships as well as their active, adventurous and fulfilling experiences. Through discussing these positive life stories with the participants and closely examining the text of our conversations, several viable personal and social explanations for this emphasis seem to appear.

Elaine provided the simplest, and perhaps the most powerful, explanation as to why she and the other reminiscers focused their narratives on positive memories. Elaine explained that, "People think of things that give them pleasure more than pain". It is difficult to argue with the notion that people are generally drawn to pleasurable activities and away from painful ones. Or the idea that pleasure can be derived by revisiting particularly rewarding periods in life through reminiscence. The act of revisiting pleasurable memories may also help explain why Gladys, and to a lesser extent Jean, remembered the past as having been a better historical period to live in than the present. In the case of these participants, the positive narrative focus may be motivated by a need to support this assumption as well as a desire to enjoy the pleasure of remembering pleasant past events.

A second reason for the positive focus and interpretation of the life stories relates to the immediate social context of the activity. All the participants clearly indicated that it was important that their grandchild enjoy the process and several grandparents appeared to conclude that positive stories would facilitate this enjoyment. Elaine stated that she did not want to make Lisa unhappy with sad and depressing stories; while Jean may have been influenced by the negative reactions she had previously encountered while attempting to discuss painful memories with other family members. Similarly, Don found it important to find words that "pleased" his listeners. Starr (1983) remarked that when reviewing the past, people select certain "acts and construe them in such a way as to form a particular characterization that suites their current social context" (p. 264). The participants in this

inquiry, in the context of being with a grandchild, tended to construe and characterize the events chosen for their narratives in positive and life-affirming ways. Moreover, most participants pointed to the importance of their grandchild's experience as an important reason for the positive nature of their constructions. As Jean stated, "most people don't want to hear about all that negative stuff anyway". The social context then, seemed to influence the decision by most grandparents to focus their life stories on positive renditions of past events indicating the grandchildren's role in co-constructing the narratives. This observation supports Marshal's (1980) assertion that "when helped to reconstruct their life story people are more likely to come up with a good story".

Just as there were personal and social reasons for the participants to positively emphasise their life stories, there were also personal and social functions and consequences for this emphasis. The most obvious result of this positive orientation was that it seemed to 'lighten' the conversations which may help to explain why the participants described the reminiscence activity as "fun", "enjoyable" and "satisfying". What may be more significant though, is the way the life-affirming nature of the stories seemed to help the participants gain a sense of satisfaction about themselves and the way that they have lived their lives. Don clearly stated that he believed the more he reviewed his past the more he felt "endorsed" about the way he had lived his life. Jean was clearly empowered by the notion that although she cannot change the past, she can change the way she feels about it. As we saw, she did change her feelings about her past in an affirming direction by emphasizing positive stories and using

humour in her renditions of difficult times. All the participants, with the exception of Don, devoted a significant portion of their positive stories to descriptions in which they portrayed themselves in affirming and complimentary ways. The existence, and shared expression, of this class of positive memories may help explain why some participants felt better about their lives after taking part in the reminiscence activity. Kastenbaum (1974) believes that a sense of validation "can be achieved through a retrospective process" in which a person's past accomplishments indicate that they are still competent and worthy "by implication" (p. 133). It is tempting to wonder if this validating effect may become more powerful when, as in the case of these participants, the complimentary and affirming stories are shared with, and acknowledged by, a loved one.

Social constructionists believe that the narrative form is the best mechanism for capturing and reflecting a sense of lived time (Bruner, 1987; Ricoeur, 1983). It follows then, that since the life stories discussed in our reminiscence conversations followed a narrative form, they, to some extent, represent each participants' present sense of the lived time of their lives. Two of the participants, Jean and Gladys, directly mentioned that the reminiscence conversations were like reliving their lives. With the positive focus of these narrative renditions, it is easy to understand how the conversations could positively influence the participants' opinions about themselves and their lives.

One shared way all the participants shaped their narrative conversations then, was to emphasise positive memories that reflected well on themselves and the way they have lived their lives. This may have been done for sheer

enjoyment, to support assumptions about the past, or to help their grandchildren enjoy the activity. This emphasis did help to make the conversations enjoyable, and in some cases, seemed to validate the participants and the lives they have lived to date.

Unhappy Memories

We have seen how these participants, in the context of this study, found it important to deliver a positively oriented self narrative. This tendency did not mean that all the reminiscence conversations were purely positive. In fact, the combined text of the conversations that took place in this inquiry also indicate that major losses and regrets can be viewed as important additions to a life story. Elaine described this phenomenon as common or even universal when she stated that, "When we look back, everyone thinks of things we would rather not have done". All the participants described painful losses in their lives and they all, with the exception of Gladys, reported feeling some degree of regret and/or remorse during these portions of the conversation. Jean found it emotionally "difficult" portraying her husband and explaining how he died in the last week of the war. Don admitted, while lamenting his failure to appreciate his mother, that "some remorse creeps in" when he thinks about this issue. But the most powerful negative reaction brought on by the reminiscence conversations was experienced by Elaine. Although she reported feeling "fine" during our conversations the discussion of her deceased husband left her unable to sleep and feeling "miserable" on both evenings following our meetings. George Shute (1986) suggests that

caution be used when utilizing reminiscence therapies. In his article Shute described a client who became depressed primarily because her reminiscence conversations precipitated the breakdown of denial that had been her primary defense mechanism. Whether the effect is "intensifying" a sense of loss or discrediting an important defense mechanism it appears to be important to realize that intense and lengthy reminiscence discussions can bring the reminiscer face to face with issues they not be completely prepared or equipped to confront.

It is important, however, not to generalize too much when describing the way the participants dealt with their unhappy memories and the regret and remorse that was sometimes associated with these encounters. Gladys described the loss of her son and her health with the candour of someone who felt in complete control of the issues and determined not to let them get in her way. Jean did report feeling remorse when she described the loss of her husband but her emotions appeared to be familiar and manageable to her. Don seemed somewhat surprised by the remorse he experienced when he described his regrets but he viewed this emotion as a necessary part of his process of dealing with these regrets. Unlike the other participants, Elaine's loss was still relatively recent (she lost her husband five years ago). Although she believed she had healed to the point where memories of her husband bring pleasure more than pain, our conversations may have forced open the door to the feelings of "profound regret" she was just managing to control. Unhappy memories then, were dealt with by all participants but there were many differences in the way they were approached and the effects they had on the reminiscers. Temporal distance from significant losses may be

a factor in assessing the likelihood of reminiscence conversations instigating the re-emergence of negative emotions.

With all the varied ways the participants dealt with, and reacted to, their unhappy memories, there were also some important commonalities. One of these commonalities concerns the way all the participants de-emphasised these memories in the context of their entire life stories. There again seems to be specific intrapsychic and social reasons for this shared tendency to de-emphasise negative memories. Besides simply wanting to avoid memories that cause them pain, Jean and Gladys both stated that they firmly believed "dwelling" on their unhappy memories only made them feel worse about the events. Don simply thinks that focusing on negative memories is a waste of time because in the grand scheme of life they are meaningless. Jean and Elaine also expressed a social reason for de-emphasising their unhappy stories which refers back to the social reason for the emphasis on positive memories. That is, the concern that negative memories would not be welcomed or enjoyed by their grandchildren. As was the case when the participants emphasised positive life stories, there seemed to have been personal and social factors that lead them to de-emphasise the regrettable events in their lives.

Another commonality concerns the way that all the participants, in discussing their painful or regrettable memories, explored the strategies they use to deal successfully with these issues. In some cases the reminiscence conversations simply enabled participants to articulate their coping strategies and in other instances the conversations were used as an opportunity to attempt to

therapeutically deal with their issues. As we have seen, not dwelling on negative issues was a popular strategy. Jean also discussed how she used humour to deal with her regrets and Gladys mentioned how she accesses the support of her family for this purpose. Elaine also explained that she avoided sad movies and the music she and her husband once danced to in an attempt to prevent depression. It may have been educational or even therapeutic to piece together and articulate these coping strategies. This part of the discussions may also have served as a way to include and describe unpleasant memories in a positive, affirming and hopeful way.

All the participants, to some degree, also used the reminiscence conversations to therapeutically deal with their regrets and losses. The most widely reported therapeutic benefit of the conversations was that they gave the participants the opportunity to openly acknowledge their regrets and misfortunes and thereby gain a sense of integrity and empowerment. Don, for instance, clearly appreciated the opportunity to bring his regrets "out into the light and have a look at them". This acknowledgement left him asking himself, "What have you been afraid of?" Jean also reported feeling a therapeutic sense of relief through expressing her feelings of being abandoned by her father, resentment of the way she was treated by her step-mother and sadness at the loss of her husband. Jean stated that she appreciated the opportunity to discuss these painful memories and "get it off my chest" because she disliked keeping them "bottled up" inside her. Gladys also did not want to totally "avoid" thinking about her lost son; in fact, she "enjoyed" remembering him as long as she did not dwell on his death. Elaine also seemed to find it important to mention the things

she regretted doing although her motives in doing so were at least partly to do with influencing her granddaughter's behaviour. Interestingly, all the participants valued the opportunity to acknowledge their unhappy memories even though most viewed their voicing of these memories as being a social liability.

Besides acknowledging his regrets and losses, Don was also able to use his present late-life perspective to render them almost insignificant. Webster and Young (1988) comment on a process similar to Don's when they maintain that, "Time provides a new construct system in which one may relive and rethink past behaviours from a different vantage point" (p. 319). Don's late-life perspective seemed to act as a new context revealing the vast majority of his life and the inevitable approach of death. From this perspective, regrets, fears and losses that were devastating at one time now seem all but insignificant.

Of the four grandparent participants only Don appeared to go beyond acknowledging his regrets to a process similar to Butler's definition of 'life review'. As we will recall, Butler described life review as an evaluative process involving a "progressive return to consciousness of past experiences, and, particularly, the resurgence of unresolved conflicts" (Butler, 1963). Don's treatment of the issue concerning his unsatisfactory relationship with his mother is a conflict that fits well into Butler's model, as does his efforts to use the reminiscence conversations to achieve a sense of reconciliation and resolution to this conflict. It does seem plausible to explain Don's need to resolve this issue as a developmental concern brought on, at least in part, by a need to put his life in order before his death. Don

frequently spoke of the death of his friends and loved ones and (although less often) about the approach of his own death. At the end of our conversations he made the following statement:

I think I ended the talk the other night saying that I didn't think I was now afraid of death. The fact that I made that remark is indicative that I gained something from these conversations.

Of note is the fact that Don appeared to have been attempting to resolve the issue concerning his mother for some time. The reminiscence discussions were a helpful part of an already established, and perhaps developmental, process in which he was able to thoroughly and publicly praise his mother in a way he never did while she was alive. As he explained, "there is satisfaction too, in at least I realize now the values my mother had". Don's narrative then, appeared to contain all the elements of Butler's life review indicating that such a complex psychological process is possible within the social context of this study.

It should not be surprising that only one of the four participants showed clear signs of engaging in a life-review. Lieberman and Tobin (1983) argue persuasively that it is unrealistic to assume that most human beings have the necessary inner skills and supportive context to achieve a thorough and conscientious life review. Instead, these researchers argue, that most reminiscers use their memory selectively to create "mythical images" that produce a picture of the self that is acceptable to the reminiscer and those around them. The clear emphasis, by all four participants, on positive descriptions of themselves and their lives as well as their minimizing treatment of negative life events seems to support Lieberman and Tobin's conclusions. It may be,

however, that some individuals use reminiscence to create acceptable images of themselves and their lives while at the same time acknowledging and perhaps even working to resolve the regrets and conflicts in their lives that are too important to ignore. In other words, the myth making and the conflict resolution processes may not be mutually exclusive.

PART TWO

The Importance of the Social Context To the Participants' Experience of the Reminiscence Conversations

So far I have discussed some of the intrapsychic and social factors that appeared to influence how the participants shaped and managed their self narratives. It is difficult to precisely separate the social from the personal aspects of the participants' experiences since the entire activity took place in a social context with influences likely too complex and subtle to be completely appreciated. One thing that should now be clear, however, is that the reflexive process of telling one's own life story is an imprecise and interpretive endeavour. Bruner (1987) argued that, "this very instability makes life stories highly susceptible to cultural, interpersonal and linguistic influences" (p. 14). This notion directly relates to one of the primary goals of this study which is to gain some understanding of how the presence of a grandchild can effect a participant's experience of reminiscing and constructing a self-narrative. I have discussed some social explanations for why the participants emphasised positive memories and some of the social consequences of this focus. I have also mentioned some of the social explanations for why negative memories were de-emphasised. This information suggests that the social context generally promotes the telling of positive stories and the minimization of negative ones. This, in turn, helped to make the experience a positive, validating and in some cases empowering experience for the participants.

With the primary role of the social context in this study it is important to closely explore the structure in

which the conversations were held and in which the social context was a part. The following brief discussion on the structure of the reminiscence conversations then, will focus as much on methodology as on the meaning of the participants' reminiscence experiences.

The Structure of the Reminiscence Conversations

The positive orientation of the self narratives has been described as an important explanation for why the participants enjoyed and reported feeling validated by the reminiscence conversations. The participants indicated that the presence of their grandchild helped motivate them to emphasize their positive life stories. Other aspects of the social context of the reminiscence conversations, directly related to the structure of the activity, may also help to explain the positive reactions to the reminiscence activity.

One likely reason why all the participants reported enjoying their reminiscence conversations relates to the way the structure of the task and social context of the activity accentuated and valued one of the great strengths of the aged - their vast store of life experience. The grandparents, in the structure of this inquiry, were clearly given the opportunity to be the key player in the social activity (for it is their story that is to be told) with the grandchild and researcher secondary recipients of the information. This structure defines the grandparent's wealth of stories and memories as a social asset and gives them the opportunity to express and exercise this strength with a grandchild of their choosing. The expression of grandparenting roles that took place within this structure was significant and will be

described in detail later.

Also of note, is the fact that the grandparent participants were asked to discuss their lives by a representative of a socially well respected institution. This may have enhanced the activity for the participants by recognizing and validating the worth of the stories that make up their lives.

Elaine seemed to most clearly appreciate the way the conversations valued her past experiences and memories. She proudly mentioned to her granddaughter how "people of [her] generation" have access to experiences that are unique and educationally valuable. She also enjoyed indicating that she had been present when several important "firsts" occurred in social history. Gladys also appeared proud of her ability to describe the changes and development of Victoria. It is as if a degree of prestige accompanied her having 'been there' when the city was so different. The social prestige offered through the structure of the reminiscence conversations then, appeared to be experienced by the participants as both enjoyable and validating.

With their grandchild present, the participants were also in a position to interact with an individual whom they all viewed as a friend and a loved family member. Their close relationships were supported by the structure of the activity in that the grandparent was able to chose the grandchild with whom they wished to reminisce. This choice was certainly important to Elaine who related how critical it was that her grandchild was able to understand and appreciate her more emotional memories; a task she did not believe other grandchildren would have been able to do. Gladys also indicated that she appreciated the opportunity to choose

Nicole who, for her, is "an absolute dear" and "the most enjoyable person to have around". In this chosen context Gladys appeared free to re-tell classic stories which confirmed the grandparent-grandchild relationship and the close nature of their family in general. Although the structure of the reminiscence activity dictated the biological relationship between the reminiscers and their partners, the grandparents' ability to chose their grandchild companion made them agents in how their experience of the reminiscence conversations would be influenced by the social context. As Gergen (1980) explained, "the individual both shapes and is shaped by their social context" (p. 41). Hence the participants' choice of caring and understanding grandchildren almost certainly had a positive influence on the self narratives that were co-constructed.

There is reason to believe then, that the structure of the reminiscence conversations helped make the reminiscence activity enjoyable and socially validating for the participants. This structure made the reminiscers the central figure, valued their past experiences, provided institutional validation, and included the presence of a chosen grandchild partner. This supportive context then, provided the participants with every opportunity to enjoy the process of constructing and telling their self narratives. From the feedback received from the grandparent participants, it appears they took full advantage of this opportunity.

The Grandchild's Role in the Conversations

Even with the structure of the reminiscence conversations facilitating their enjoyment, the participants

found their grandchild's experience of the activity to be very important. Concern over the grandchild's experience was particularly acute for Jean. Throughout our conversations Jean indicated that she was often concerned about what others thought of her and feared that her life story was fairly boring and might be dull for Nicole to hear. To a lesser extent, Jean's concern about how her grandchild experienced the conversations was shared by the other participants. Don, we have seen, was interested in choosing his language in a way that Alex found to be entertaining and educational. Similarly, Elaine, even though she claims to be "beyond" caring what others think, clearly mentioned that she did not want to make Lisa unhappy with her stories. Although Gladys did not directly mention concern about Michele's experience of the activity, she did wonder what "kids today" might think of her life. In this case it is likely that the women (and perhaps most of the family) are so close and their relationships so secure that Michele's enjoyment was taken for granted. Taken as a whole, the participants considered their grandchild's experience of the activity to be very important and this concern significantly influenced the nature of the conversations.

With the grandchild's experience of the reminiscence activity being a prominent concern, the participants often shaped their interactions in ways that might promote their grandchild's involvement and thus increase their level of interest and enjoyment. In several instances these strategies to involve their grandchildren also served to address more personal intrapsychic concerns. Jean appeared to try to engage Nicole in the reminiscence activity by drawing her into a more interactive role in their conversations. Often she

fluctuated the temporal focus of her speech in such a way as to invite Nicole to participate as a representative of a younger generation. Jean also laced her narrative with wit and sarcasm and put a humorous spin on the sad stories that she thinks "nobody wants to hear". In most cases these narrative techniques served to elicit laughter and commentary from Nicole. Don also encouraged Alex to actively participate by speaking in an entertaining manner and quizzing his grandson on the identity of his relatives with old photos. Jean also quizzed Michele with photographs and elicited responses from her by asking her to confirm her statements about herself and the nature of their family. Gladys' retelling of well known family stories was probably also partly motivated by a desire to engage and receive a confirming reaction from Michele.

In other instances the participants seemed to draw their grandchild into the conversations for personal reasons. In a few cases Jean switched the focus of her narrative from past to present, not only to engage Nicole but also in an effort to come to grips with the changes associated with the passage of time. Jean, as we have seen, also gained a great deal of personal satisfaction from perceiving Nicole's interest in her stories and part of Nicole's interest was likely expressed through her participation in the interactions facilitated by Jean's frequent returns to the present, her humour and her positive narrative focus. Similarly, the confirmations Gladys received from Michele also reinforced her personal beliefs about herself and their family. Several of the participants then, appeared to shape their conversations to increase the likelihood that their grandchild would participate and find the activity interesting and enjoyable. In some instances the

participant's efforts to engage their grandchild in dialogue served the dual purpose of promoting their grandchild's interest and satisfying personal needs for self and family confirmation.

While Jean, Gladys and Don actively shaped parts of their self narratives to engage and elicit interaction with their grandchildren, Elaine never had to make an effort in this regard. Her self narrative was highly interactive throughout and this level of exchange appeared to exert a strong influence on the nature of the reminiscence activity. Elaine's narrative generally followed a chronological course until she touched on issues of strong mutual interest at which time Lisa increased her level of interaction, serving to focus the dialogue. This focused and highly interactive dialogue precipitated a change in Elaine's narrative style from primarily descriptive to more exploratory and interpretive. These factors also slowed the narrative down and may have prevented Elaine from even mentioning some of the events she later identified as being the most significant in her life.

Lisa's interest and high participation in the dialogue seemed to enable her to gain some control over the content of Elaine's narrative. Lisa exercised this control when she took the conversation to a more intimate and personal level by asking Elaine how she first met Jack, Elaine's deceased husband. This was a question which may have prompted Elaine to discuss an issue that she would not have otherwise explored and may not have been ready to confront.

The interactive nature of Elaine's self narrative seems to support Wallace's (1992) view of "talk of the past" as being a "social activity, growing out of and shaped by narrative challenges posed in the course of interaction"

(p. 121). Wallace claims that the elderly do not often respond well to requests for broad, all-encompassing accounts of their lives. Instead, they are more receptive to specific inquiries into aspects of their past lives. It is difficult to say whether the specification resulting from Lisa's inquiries made the reminiscence process easier or more satisfying for Elaine. Their interaction did appear to be very natural and similar to the conversations one might expect them to have in any other setting. Of importance, however, is the possibility, gleaned from their conversations, that a high level of interaction from the grandchild may lessen the amount of control the grandparent has over the content and direction of their narratives. This lost control may, in turn, leave the reminiscer more vulnerable to disturbing issues which they may not be ready to encounter or equipped to deal with.

All the participants' experiences of the reminiscence conversations then, were influenced by their verbal interactions with their grandchild. Because it was important for each grandparent that their grandchild enjoy the conversations, some participants shaped their narratives to actively involve their grandchild. This involvement was sometimes used by the grandparent as support and personal confirmation. A high level of interactive dialogue was shown to potentially lead to a situation in which the grandparent loses primary control over the content and pace of the conversation leaving them vulnerable to a unwanted confrontation with unresolved issues.

Co-construction of Self Narratives

Clearly, the presence and participation of the

grandchildren influenced the grandparents' experience of the reminiscence conversations. In this sense, the grandchildren co-constructed the self-narratives described by their grandparents. The active dialogue between Elaine and Lisa provided the most explicit example of the co-construction process which seemed to take place in the formation of all the participants' life stories. Lisa's degree of control and authorship over parts of the narrative was reflected by her apparent attempts to co-construct new versions of her grandmother's stories of the past. In these instances Lisa offered, and even negotiated for, different interpretations of Elaine's experiences in school. These exchanges correspond to Tarman's (1988) perspective on life review, a process which she believes "can be seen as a form of negotiation, the negotiation of one's lifetime" (p. 187). This negotiation process, Tarman argued, can be an intrapersonal or interpersonal process aimed at self-acceptance and social approval. Interestingly, Lisa, as a caring family member, worked to reconstruct some of Elaine's memories in a way that shifted responsibility for negative events away from her grandmother indicating her interest in helping Elaine construct an acceptable life story.

Another clear example of how the process of co-construction can lead to significant reconstruction of one's life story took place in the conversation between Jean and Nicole. Jean, we have seen, was concerned that the stories of her life were boring but when she perceived Nicole to be "enjoying" the process "and taking it all in", she felt "flattered" and "encouraged", and decided that the events in her life were not "dull" after all. In a sense then, Nicole's enjoyment of the reminiscence conversation helped Jean to

change her interpretation of her life stories from potentially dull and boring to entertaining and interesting. Jean's experience corresponds to Polkinghorne's conception of the self.

The concept of self is not the discovery or release of some innate 'I'; it is a construction built on other peoples responses and attitudes towards a person and is subject to change as these responses change in their character (p. 150).

In a sense then, the self is always a co-construction. By simply being with their grandparents during their reminiscence process the grandchildren influenced the life stories told and the way they were interpreted. Certainly in Jean and Nicole's and Elaine and Lisa's conversations the grandchildren helped to author a positive version of their grandparent's lives.

Gladys had a similar change of perspective. She reconstructed her childhood and changed her perception of the period from a number of "rough growing up years" to having had a "very happy childhood when you start looking back". Although the grandchild's influence is less clear in this case, to the extent that Gladys' strong emphasis on positive memories (which seemed to lead to the reconstruction) was due to Michele's presence, her affirming reinterpretation of her childhood was influenced by her grandchild's presence.

These reconstructions, in Jean and Elaine's narratives particularly, were born from the nature of their interactions. Gergen (1985) stated that, "knowledge is not something people possess but something they do" (p. 10). Similarly Lax (1991) argued that, "the interaction itself is where the new narrative of one's life emerges" which is not the teller's story or the listener's but "a co-construction of the two" (p. 73). From this perspective the reconstructions mentioned were

just prominent examples of a co-construction process that is the basis for the self-narratives told by all the participants. It is important to mention, however, that the grandparent participants were active agents in both the co-construction of their stories and, with the choice of grandchildren, the formation of the social context that co-authored their narratives. Thus the choice of loving, caring grandchildren helped ensure that the co-constructed self narratives would be reinforcing and empowering stories.

The Valued Elder

As family representatives, the influence each grandchild had on their grandparent's experience of the reminiscence conversations was partly contingent on the unique and complex relationship between the participant and their broader family system - to say nothing of the wider cultural expectations that shape this system. At certain times during each set of interviews the fact that the listener was a grandchild family member became of prominent importance and influenced the nature of the conversation. The significance of Michele's role as a family member to Gladys was evident throughout our talks and was reflected in the well known stories Gladys chose to tell as well as the way she asked Michele for confirmations concerning the caring and cohesive nature of their family. Similarly, Elaine found it important to leave Lisa with a mental "picture" of her great grandparents and Don's stories were partly motivated by a desire to help his "children's children". Kivnick (1988) suggests that the process of reviewing one's life and expressing grandparenting roles are complimentary activities. She cites research which indicates

that the expression of grandparent roles facilitated by the life review process "may be viewed as contributing to psychosocial well-being" (p. 63). Although each grandparent /grandchild interaction in this study was as unique as the respective families, there were some common family oriented roles taken by the grandparents.

Jean-Paul Sartre once wrote that,

Man lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him in terms of these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it.

This quote suggests that the story of someone's life must fit in with a "community of life stories" (Bruner, 1987, p. 21) provided by their immediate and greater social context. Each family has a set of stories that define the nature of the relationships encompassed by that family. Gladys' family classics, for instance, were stories that, like mortar, helped to reinforce and hold the family structure in place. Family stories are constructed through a dialogical interchange between the family members and the social culture in which they live. Starr (1983) argued that, "socially structured status sequences" such as grandparenthood, have no "inherent self-evident meaning" (p. 161). Instead, they are creations of the stories told by people in a particular cultural context. Similarly, Polkinghorne (1988) argues that "cultures provide specific types of plots for adoption by its members in their configuration of self" (p. 153). Grandparenthood is clearly a storied role that is considered valuable and meaningful in the Western culture embraced by these participants.

Kiviniick (1982) describes several dimensions of

grandparenthood that apply to the experience of her participants in their shared cultural context. One of the dimensions that appears to be particularly relevant to the participants of this study is that of "The Valued Elder". Part of this dimension of grandparenthood is the feeling of being responsible for the teaching of family, cultural and social history. For Kivinick, the grandparents are the "grandchildren's connection to history" a role that includes linking the family's youngest generation with the older generations no longer represented among the living (p. 71). The cultural stories that help define the role of grandparenthood seem to include the role of story teller whose function it is to preserve the very stories that define a family and the culture in which it is couched.

Each of the participants fulfilled this storyteller dimension in their own way. Jean seemed to take the role of a valued elder in that she found it important to generalize her narrative to include the life stories of her deceased husband and father not to mention her proud accounts of her Scottish ancestors. Besides richly describing his father, Don used his photographs to teach and test Alex on the identity of other (living and deceased) family members. He also stated that a great deal of his stories were designed to be helpful and could be classified under the educational heading of "Let me show you". In one such story Don described to Alex the intricate skills of cutting stone which his own father had once taught him. Don stated that "its different having a grandchild there and the difference is um, an inherent desire to convey things in a helpful way". Similarly, Gladys took pleasure in describing her new found relatives in England to Michele and hoped that they would one day meet her

granddaughter. Elaine also found it important to leave Lisa with a mental picture of her great grandparents, something that would not been important to do, she stated, with a contemporary. This portrayal was part of Elaine's effort to provide a sense of family and social continuity for her grandchild. An effort that included a detailed exploration and discussion of the development of social and cultural history.

A great deal of the culturally and socially educational stories that reflect the valued elder dimension of grandparenthood are examples of what Watt and Wong (1991) described as "transmissive reminiscence". These researchers claimed that "it is not reminiscence per se that yields adaptive benefits, but rather types of reminiscence". Their definition of transmissive reminiscence includes descriptions of historical events, cultural heritage and one's own values, indicating congruence with Kivnick's valued elder dimension of grandparenthood. Watt and Wong also argued that transmissive reminiscence is one of the two types of reminiscence which their research shows to be adaptive.

As a culturally constructed dimension of granparenthood the valued elder role is likely a satisfying and reinforcing identity to take on for a grandparent. Wallace (1992) states that, "By fulfilling cultural expectations and facilitating interaction with persons of different ages, self-esteem may be enhanced" (p. 124). Holzberg (1984) also described the pleasure the seniors she studied took in "performing the role of cultural custodian" (p. 269). Indeed as Don stated, "if out of that I can find the least shred or particle that could be of use to my kids or my kid's kids then it has to give me satisfaction". The reminiscence conversations then, seemed to

facilitate the expression of culturally defined grandparent roles. The expression of these roles may be another important part of why the participants found the activity to be an enjoyable one.

Summary

It is now appropriate to focus this inquiry on a brief description of how this group of participants generally experienced their reminiscence conversations in the presence of myself and their grandchildren. All the participants described their experience as being enjoyable, which can be attributed to several factors. First, there was a clear positive bias in the content and style of the self-narratives. This was generally due to the personal pleasure that was reported to come from recalling and telling positively oriented stories and the social belief that their grandchild would not want to hear painful memories. Unhappy life events were consequently de-emphasised although important losses and regrets were acknowledged by all participants. While most found the opportunity to acknowledge these events empowering and comforting, only one participant actively used the conversations to help resolve troubling issues concerning his regrets in a way similar to Butler's 'life review'. The structure of the conversations was designed to validate the participant's life stories by making the grandparents and their memories the central focus of the social activity and enabling them to choose their grandchild partner. The structures apparent success in supporting a validating and perhaps empowering social context may partly explain why the experience was a pleasurable one for the participants.

In general then, the participants found the conversations enjoyable, validating and to some extent therapeutic. Of primary concern to this study, however, is the question of the effect of the grandchild on the way the conversations were experienced. The accounts given by the grandparents certainly seem to indicate that the grandchildren promoted an emphasis on positive stories and a de-emphasis of negative ones. The participants also shaped the conversations in such a way as to engage and interest their grandchildren as well as use their grandchildren to satisfy personal issues. To varying degrees, the grandchildren also revealed their roles as co-authors of their grandparents narratives. In these instances, the caring nature of the chosen listeners helped to reconstruct some narratives in a positive direction. Finally, the grandchildren also enabled the participants to express the culturally defined grandparent role of the 'valued elder'. A role in which the participants enjoyed teaching and reinforcing cultural and family history and values. The promotion of positive stories, the positive reconstructions of the past and the expression of meaningful grandparent roles then, are all aspects of the participants' experience which were strongly influenced by their grandchildren's presence.

While these influences were supportive and perhaps even therapeutic, an important word of caution is needed. As we have seen, during one set of highly interactive conversations the participant relinquished a significant amount of control over her narrative to her grandchild. This could have prevented her from discussing important life events and may have lead her to confront disturbing issues she was not prepared to deal with. A risk then, inherent in this dialogical process, is that the grandchild's interests and

curiosity may steer the conversations away from the stories the reminiscer wants to tell and the stories that are most likely to be safe and beneficial to her.

Finally, this inquiry found that the competing conceptions of reminiscence therapy as being either primarily a social process or primarily an intrapsychic process may be too simplistic. Tarman's (1988) arguments on autobiographical reminiscence seem to reflect some of the findings of this inquiry.

Reminiscence is functional or adaptive when it boosts the individual's status in a social interaction; it is pleasant when memories and the consequent interaction are favourable; and it is a process which occurs more intensely for some, those who are faced with an awareness of their oncoming death and are thus faced with the task of legitimating their biography to themselves and others. This calls for the purposeful selection of consistent, coherent and socially acceptable or desirable memories (p. 185).

Here Tarman describes the developmentalist conception of reminiscence as a means to build a life story with meaning and integrity in preparation for one's death. However, she also emphasises the notion that this process is couched in a social interaction which centres on the need for identity maintaining or strengthening stories that are socially pleasing and empowering. In this study a rich and culturally meaningful social context was provided for autobiographical reminiscence which, as we have seen, influenced the content and style of the narratives as well as the way the activity was experienced by the grandparent. This context did not, however, prevent the participants from using the conversations to grapple with personal and developmental issues. Don's use of the conversations to help resolve a deep conflict, quite probably

made urgent by the relative proximity of death, appears to fit well into Butler's and Erickson's developmental models. The participants also looked after their personal needs in other ways even when, as in the case of acknowledging regrets and mistakes, the behaviour was viewed as being a social liability. Perhaps, as Tarman stated, the social and psychological processes of reminiscence are "two sides of the same coin" (p. 185). Constructing a self-narrative with a grandchild then, may promote the creation of a positively oriented narrative and the positive reconstruction of memories as well as allow for the expression of satisfying grandparent roles. But the activity does not prevent the participant from using the conversations in a developmental quest for integrity in the last stages of life. While the positive orientation promoted by the grandchild's presence may run counter to the frank evaluative life review process many people may be better served acknowledging their mistakes and reconstructing their stories with a positive bias instead of spending their last years grappling with the intransigent and deep-seated issues that lay at the heart of the life review process.

Implications For Counsellors

The following comments are important considerations for helping professionals who have read this research and intend to use a form of reminiscence therapy in their practice.

1. The varying circumstances of each human being's life means that people become increasingly diverse as they age. By the time they are old the differences between people are maximized (Coleman, 1986). Therefore, the categories and

themes I have presented are in no way fixed, exclusive or universal. At different times in their lives people express different and even contradictory characteristics. These categories and themes described then, should be seen as dynamic in that they are representative of a particular individuals in a certain context at a specific time. Because Elaine is still working through a grieving process, for instance, she may be less suitable for this form of therapy now than she will be when she has come to terms with her loss. Other individuals may even find this form of reminiscence therapy to help them through their grief.

2. Simple generalizations about the value of reminiscence are naive and pointless. Each person needs to be considered in a special way. Whether reminiscence is a positive or a negative factor in an individuals life; whether they can be helped with reminiscence that disturbs them or causes them pain; and whether reminiscence should be avoided or stimulated, are all questions that should be raised before a reminiscence intervention is started.

3. It is important to understand that, as Webster and Young (1988) point out, "The review of the past is not a past event, rather it is a present event" (p. 321). It is a reconstruction of the past in terms of the participant's current belief and construct systems.

4. These researchers also note the importance for counsellors to appreciate the therapeutic possibilities of reviewing one's life. Both counselling and reminiscence therapy involve the client's need to attain meaning and purpose through the recall and discussion of past events"

(p. 320). Many of the beneficial outcomes of counselling then, may be attained through the use of reminiscence therapy.

5. The social context in which reminiscence therapy takes place will have a bearing on the form and function of the experience for the client. Therefore, due consideration of the social context is important. It would seem that a supportive and empathic family member, chosen by the participant, may increase the likelihood that the reminiscer constructs a positive, affirming and reinforcing life story. This social context does not, however, prevent the reminiscer from attempting to resolve past regrets in order to gain a sense of integrity at the conclusion of their lives.

6. Although I have periodically referred to the reminiscence activity which took place in this inquiry as "reminiscence therapy" the term reminiscence conversations is a more accurate description. Therapy generally refers to healing and curative power and these qualities could not be well explored with healthy well-adjusted participants like those in this study. The reminiscence activity presented here is best seen as a growth promoting exercise with therapeutic effects and not a clinical therapy in itself. Although the positively oriented self narratives did not make the exploration of deep unresolved issues impossible, the ideal context for such clinical endeavors may not include a grandchild whose presence may hinder the frank exploration of past regrets.

Implications For Further Research

The following is a list of research ideas generated by

some of the findings of this inquiry.

1. The participants in this inquiry clearly indicated that the fact that their grandchild was present (and not a contemporary for instance) influenced the content and style of the stories they told. This finding suggests that reminiscence conversations in different social contexts will tend to elicit different experiences. More research needs to be done to explore the experience of reminiscing in different social contexts so that one day different clients can be matched to the type of reminiscence therapy that best suits their needs.

2. As an individual still engaged in a grieving process, Elaine experienced a resurfacing and focusing of her grief and sense of loss after each reminiscence conversation. Research needs to be done to explore the relationship between grief and reminiscence since grief due to loss is a common and very important issue in the aged population. It may be interesting and useful to ask if individuals experience reminiscence therapy (as it is demonstrated in this study) in different ways at different stages of grief.

3. Because all the participants in this study were Caucasians from European decent, research is clearly needed to discover what similarities and differences exist in the way different cultural and ethnic groups experience reminiscence.

4. Research is also needed to explore the longer term effects of reminiscence therapies like the conversations in this inquiry. These participants enjoyed the conversations and some even seemed to positively change the way they thought

and felt about parts of their lives. Further research needs to assess how significant and long lasting changes like these can be.

5. In Don's case, life review was clearly evident in other activities besides the reworking of memories. It seemed that our conversations were an opportunity for him to fully express and confront a classic life review conflict he had been working to resolve for some time. Further research could investigate reminiscence therapy as one of several different activities which aid in the resolution of past conflicts.

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APPENDIX (A)**Letter of Informed Consent**

You are invited to participate in a research study which is designed to explore and describe the experience of reminiscence therapy in the presence of a grandchild. When completed, this research will fill the requirements of my masters thesis from the department of Psychological Foundations in Education at the University of Victoria, B.C.

The reminiscence therapy will consist of me (the researcher) asking you to convey to your grandchild the important memories that make up the story of your life. There will be two reminiscence interviews with you, your grandchild and myself present, and one interview in which you will describe your experience of the life review to me alone. There will be a brief second interview so that I can check with you and ensure that I correctly understood and represented your experience. All the interviews will be audiotaped but not videotaped.

There are no anticipated risks involved in your participation and the only inconvenience will be the time used to help me with my research. My hope is that you will gain insights on yourself and perhaps your grandchild and this may be rewarding and validating for you.

Your decision to participate is completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate you can withdraw at any time without explanation. You can also turn the tape recorder off at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions. Your decision to participate or not to participate will have no effect on your standing with myself or the University of Victoria.

All the information you share with me will be kept strictly confidential. A code word, not your name, will be used to identify your audiotapes and all transcriptions. The

list of names, and corresponding code words, will be kept in a locked desk drawer and will be destroyed after the research is complete. The information on your audiotape will only be shared with my research supervisor (Dr. Peavy) and two other thesis committee members. When my research is completed the audiotapes will be erased and the transcripts destroyed unless you, as a participant, show a desire to keep your own information.

If you have any questions now or at any time during or after the research is complete please contact me. I can be reached at this address:

Kelly S. Reid
950 Falmouth RD. V8X 2A2
Victoria, B.C, Canada,
Telephone # (604) 380-0245

Your signature on this form indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may, at any time, withdraw from this study after signing this form and all information concerning you will be destroyed and erased.

Signature: ----- Date: -----
Researcher: -----

VITA

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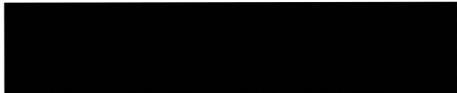
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Title of Thesis:

An Exploration of the Experience of Reminiscence
Conversations Done in the Presence of a Grandchild

Author



Kelly Stephen Reid
May 2, 1995

Christmases she had as a child, Gladys admitted that "I've had a very happy childhood really, when you start thinking back and reminisce, I've had a very happy childhood". Clearly, Gladys had "rough" and "happy" times as a child but through the course of remembering and discussing the positive events of her childhood she seems to have changed her overall evaluation of this period in a positive direction.

The Importance of Michele's Presence

One very important aspect of Gladys's experience of "enjoying" the reminiscence activity concerns the powerful love she has for Michele and the simple delight she feels being in her granddaughter's company. Gladys believes Michele is "a wonderful girl...an absolute dear" and "It was just enjoyable having her here because she is just such an enjoyable person to have around". The frequent laughter and the good humoured teasing that took place between the two women also underlined their warm relationship and the pleasure they both felt being in each other's company.

It is difficult, however, to clearly separate this close personal relationship from the intimate nature of the family as a whole. For Gladys, Michele is both a pleasant individual and a grandchild in a profoundly important family system. Throughout the reminiscence conversations Gladys asked Michele to confirm various assertions she made and through these confirmations Michele's role as a friend and family member were revealed. In one instance Gladys seemed to need the reassurance of a close friend when she said to Michele that she has not let her disability get her down, "Have I, Michele?" Then, in other situations Gladys seemed to need the

confirmation of a close family member. One such instance took place when Gladys wanted to emphasize how important Christmas has been to the family and said, "It still is, isn't it Michele"? Similarly, Gladys wanted to describe how cohesive the family is by stating "we have all stuck together really well, haven't we Michele"? Michele's role as a family member was also highlighted throughout the conversations by a variety of exchanges. These included a discussion over the inherited aversion to certain school subjects over three generations and detailed descriptions of family photos in which obscure family members were identified and described. By simply being there as a friend and loved family member Michele seemed to positively influence Gladys' experience. During appropriate periods of the conversation each of these roles was emphasized by Gladys to elicit supportive confirmations concerning personal and family issues.

Validation Through Tradition

One distinguishing feature of these reminiscence conversations was that a majority of the seemingly important and enjoyable memories Gladys told were of events that she took part in on a regular predictable basis. These routine experiences seemed to give her life order and meaning and were described by Gladys with some of the pride and reverence often reserved for time honoured customs. And like customs, Gladys took part in these regular activities with the particular social group that seemed to have been the most important to her at the time.

Gladys seemed to particularly enjoy describing the regular family excursions to Elk Lake and Qualicum Beach that

she used to take as a child. The entire extended family would go to the same field by Elk Lake, "every Sunday and every Sunday there was no one else there". The regularity of these visits to the same location left Gladys and her family feeling a sense of ownership over the field on which the family picnicked. As Gladys said, "that was our spot. We figured it was". Gladys' also made annual trips to Qualicum Beach with her extended family. During these regular excursions there was a bonfire lit every evening and Gladys even seemed to take pleasure in describing how their Model T Ford never failed to over-heat on route to the beach. These Qualicum Beach memories seemed to be of particular importance because it is in the context of these regular and enjoyable outings that she remembers the important individuals in her extended family. As Gladys states,

Really those were the happiest years of my life-when we all went back there together. Because now I don't have any of my aunts left at all and my grandparents are dead and my mom and dad are dead so those are very important. I have many, many happy memories.

The regular Elk Lake and Qualicum Beach trips seem to create an idyllic childhood image for Gladys of regular, personal and social harmony. Through reminiscence she was able to revisit this place where all the people who were most important to her as a child were present and happy to be together.

As is often the case, Gladys reached an age in which she needed important social contacts outside her family and she acquired these relationships by going dancing on a regular basis. On three different occasions she mentioned that she, "just lived for dancing". She, "never missed a Wednesday, a Friday or a Saturday night dance", "it was [her] whole life

really". Gladys was well known and respected in these dance clubs and the formation of her identity as a young adult was likely greatly influenced by these outings.

After Gladys met Cec (her future husband), who does not dance, she never went to another dance again. The dancing seems to have been replaced by other rituals that Gladys took part in as a member of a couple. Her "big thing" became going to a movie with Cec "every Saturday night" and then they would go, "to the same restaurant and order the same mushroom omelette". For Gladys, "whatever omelette" they have now "never tastes the same as that one did". This is likely because her memory of that particular dish is intertwined with her fond recollections of their regular dating routine.

Presently, Gladys and Cec have been going regularly to French Creek and they have been doing this for so long that if they don't "turn up there people ask, Where are they"? Just as Gladys was taken on her family's weekly and annual trips to Elk Lake and Qualicum Beach, these traditional trips almost always include their children and grandchildren who now have their own recreational vehicles and will almost certainly carry on this tradition long after Gladys and Cec have passed away.

All through Gladys' development then, she has taken part in regular social events which, like traditions such as Christmas or Easter, helped to define who she was socially and personally. These traditions were obvious focal points during our reminiscence conversations and Gladys seemed able to re-experience the significance and meaning of these rich memories by remembering and describing them.

While many of the stories Gladys chose to tell focused on important regularly repeated events, her acts of telling some

of her more specific tales appeared to be traditional events in themselves. Gladys made it clear that Michele, "knew all the points" or main events in her life and therefore the content of their conversations contained very little new information. Yet Gladys was "sure [Michele] was enjoying what was being said". A great deal of the enjoyment experienced by both women likely came from the simple act of retelling stories that could be considered 'family classics'. This may have been a similar enjoyment to the pleasure she described experiencing while taking part in the traditional events that punctuated her life. In this case however, it was the act of telling these family classics that constituted the enjoyable tradition. As Gladys explains, "There may have been a couple of things I said in front of her that she didn't know about, but just going through the memories with her being there was really enjoyable".

These often told stories included descriptions of how Gladys first met Cec because she won a coin toss with another woman and how the R.C.M.P. stopped an aircraft Gladys and Cec were aboard because Cec had left his wallet at the airport. There were other stories that Gladys' family "often make a joke out of" and "will never let her forget" but the one the two women seemed to enjoy the most described Gladys leaping out of a car, despite her disability, because the vehicle in front of them was on fire. This was a story Michele and her mother (Gladys' daughter) had "often talked about" but Gladys was clearly pleased that Michele still found this story "hilarious". It was also important for Gladys that, although Michele "was just a kid" when it happened, "she still remembers". The joy for Gladys in telling these stories was not in the hope that they were unknown to Michele, but

conversely, because they were well know to her. The enjoyment seemed to come from the process of retelling the loved stories and seeing the joyful recognition which confirmed their relationship and, in a broader sense, the closeness and cohesion of their entire family.

Coming Home

As much of this inquiry has indicated, it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of family and tradition in Gladys' life. Another, seemingly meaningful part of our conversations took place when Gladys reminisced about travelling back to England with Cec, where they were reunited with their homeland and reconnected with previously unknown family members. The powerful effect of returning to England for the first time since she was an infant seemed to startle Gladys.

I thought, oh my God, I'm standing on English soil at last. It was just absolutely unbelievable to be back there were I was born. It just absolutely thrilled me right through.

Although Gladys had no family left in England, they did establish relationships with several members of Cecs' family who acknowledged and warmly welcomed them as family members. Gladys also visited the grave of Cecs' father which seemed to have a significant impact upon her because she was able to memorize and repeat the lengthy phrase written on his headstone. Gladys' decision to discuss in detail her journey to reconnect with her ancestral home and people may be related to her love of tradition, especially when it relates to the family. Gladys also appeared to want Michele to know about these family members and said that she "found it very

enjoyable" describing "the relations" with her granddaughter. Moreover, she would like Michele to one day "see some of these relations who would know she was an off-spring" of Cec and herself. It appeared to be personally satisfying for Gladys to discuss this trip and this enjoyment was likely due to the way the trip reconnected her to her personal and ancestral past. She also seemed to find the story to be socially rewarding to tell because their discovery of the English branch of their family is also significant for Michele whose family base was also broadened by the event.

Dealing With Misfortune

Gladys has not escaped the severe physical and social losses that are often a part of the accumulated experiences of the aged. The two most difficult losses she has had to endure are the loss of her three year old son in an automobile accident and the loss of a great deal of her mobility and independence due to severe arthritis. Gladys did not hesitate to discuss these losses in an open and detailed manner suggesting that she has been quite successful in dealing with her misfortunes. Our reminiscence conversations seemed to invite Gladys to articulate how these losses occurred and the social help and personal strategies she used, and uses, to successfully cope with them.

When Gladys' son, Wayne, was hit and killed by an automobile in front of their home she had a mental breakdown severe enough that her doctor recommended that she be hospitalized for an extended period of time. It is not surprising that it was the strength of Gladys' love of her family that she was able to access and use to overcome her