

Exploring Persons' Experiences of Keeping In Touch With Loved Ones Who Have Died

by

Christine Margaret Upright  
B.Sc.N., University of Victoria, 1981

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

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University of Victoria

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## ABSTRACT

This descriptive, exploratory study framed within Parse's theory of humanbecoming, addressed the research question: What is the meaning of persons' experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who have died. Seven persons described their experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who had died. Study themes in the language of the participants were *treasured events and signs give rise to lasting comfort while constant yet changing bonds come with turmoil and tranquility amid unfolding strength and confidence*. Interpreted in the language of the researcher, study findings were written as *cherished ciphers and occurrences engender solace as enduring-shifting ties abide with ease unease amid fortifying expansion*. Study themes were linked primarily with theoretical concepts of *valuing imaging, connecting-separating, and transforming*. Findings were discussed in light of relevant literature, and possibilities for nursing practice, education, policy, and further research were offered.

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## Chapter 1: Introducing and Backgrounding the Thesis

And she said: tell me a story...

And they said: Once upon a time...

This thesis is the telling of my story as a person/researcher and the telling of the stories of seven participants who generously shared their stories and the stories of loved ones who died but who live on with them. The unfolding of this thesis has been a reverent journey of discovery; I shall do my best to tell the stories well.

### *Introduction*

In this chapter I outline the importance and relevance of the topic, state goals for the research, and show how I am exploring theoretical perspectives and philosophical assumptions. To help illustrate the nature of my story as a person/researcher, I will include excerpts from my personal journal, and will highlight quotes from participants, and identify relevant popular literature, and music. I would like to preface my first illustration by expressing that this thesis has been a labor of love, a source of inspiration in a wonderland of discovery.

### *Finding the Topic for Research*

“There is no use trying,” said Alice; “one can’t believe impossible things.” “I dare say you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” (Carroll, L., 1865)

My topic for research involves the phenomenon of *keeping in touch* or the ongoing communication between persons and their loved ones who died, which on the surface may seem like an impossible thing. However, as I have come to understand, this kind of connectedness is not impossible at all. For example, Park & Benore (2006) have shown that, for persons who wish to remain connected with their loved ones after death,

ongoing communications have been consoling and deeply personal experiences. Over the years I have been deeply moved by compelling stories from students, nurses and other persons about their experiences of ongoing communication with those who have died, and by the need for understanding of and support for this experience. Thus, my interest in conducting qualitative research regarding the meaning of ongoing communication between persons and their loved ones who died emerged from formal and informal study, as well as from experiences as person, daughter, nurse, and nurse educator. Indeed, I did not choose this thesis topic: I was inspired by it, and the flame of this inspiration was continually illuminated by the research participant stories. It is my hope that the findings from this research will inspire others engaged in practice, education, and policy development.

... for the people who may be benefiting from your research, I guess my thought is I hope that people would keep an open mind to keeping in touch ... there's a lot of comfort in keeping in touch with people who have died, because they may not be with us in the physical world but they may be with us in the world beyond. And that we may have a lot to learn from them ... they're not really that far away you know ... they are still in our lives in memory and ... part of our lives spiritually and being connected that way. (Kathy, participant two, 2008)

For the purposes of this study I propose that ongoing communication between living and deceased persons can come in many guises. For example, as I have come to understand the phenomenon, people may talk about or describe feeling, hearing, seeing, knowing, or speaking with a person who has died.

### *Keeping in Touch*

The phrase “let’s keep in touch” is common in daily exchanges between persons who wish to maintain ongoing communication and remain connected with each other. A review of theoretical literature (discussed in Chapter Two) surfaced the phenomenon of

keeping in touch as a focus of study related to the experience of ongoing communication. Guided by a descriptive, exploratory methodology and within the framework of the humanbecoming theory (Parse, 1981, 1992, 1998, 2007), this study focuses on the experience of persons who keep in touch with their loved ones who died. In nursing, the teaching and learning of what it means to care for persons at the end of life is an ongoing process. Thus, the goals of this qualitative study are (1) to contribute to knowledge development within the discipline of nursing regarding the phenomenon of keeping in touch with persons who have died; (2) to provide new understandings of this phenomenon that can inform nursing practice and education based on the findings of this research that shape nurses and students' ways of being with people in practice; (3) to inform policy development that support persons after the death of a loved one; and, (4) to offer other areas for further research in relation to keeping in touch.

#### *Exploring Theoretical Perspectives and Philosophical Assumptions*

The graduate students' important quest to articulate an ontology and epistemology in research became for me much more than a process of learning to do research, it became a personal journey of transformation.

I have always been on a quest to discover my unfolding becoming. As a child I would seek the quiet hidden places to discover and create worlds of the self, others and beyond. My childhood days were filled with the joy of creating worlds upon worlds upon... As I have grown to be what others call an adult, my childhood joy of discovering and cocreating worlds with others continues. As a person, daughter, sister, aunt, friend, nurse, educator, actor, singer I cocreate many worlds with others. In my first Master's class the professor, Dr. Deborah (Northrup) Thoun, who later became my thesis supervisor, read a quote from Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1973):

When human beings understand their place in the universe, they will be able to grow to assume that place. But the answer is not in the words on this page. The answer lies within you. You can become a channel and a source of inner strength. ...you can be yourself only if you

are no one else. You must give up seeking “their” approval, whoever “they” are, and look to yourself for evaluation of success and failure, in terms of your own level of aspiration that is consistent with your own values. Nothing is simpler and nothing is more difficult. (p. 165)

After hearing this quote I shed a tear of longing and joy for the past, present and future all at once. I was excited about the new adventure that was about to unfold and the new worlds I was about to discover. The years following that first Masters class have been the most profound, painful, joyful, reverent and cherished in my life thus far ... may the wonderment continue... (Personal journal entry, 2008)

As I am learning about the researching process, I have come to value the importance of rigour in research. I recognize that all research studies are implicitly or explicitly grounded within a specific theoretical framework or paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Mitchell, 1995). A paradigm is a belief system or worldview (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) that sets the stage for the unfolding of the ontology, epistemology and research method. Cody (1997) describes a paradigm as a position from which a person can create a philosophical perspective of the phenomenon of concern. I will briefly explicate two overarching scientific paradigms, the natural science and human science paradigms. Then two nursing paradigms, the totality and simultaneity paradigms will be summarized.

#### *Natural Science Paradigm*

For over four hundred years the natural science paradigm has been the prominent, traditional perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Natural science, or the positivist paradigm, has traditionally been the base for scientific inquiry. Natural science has generally been described as “branches of organized knowledge concerned with the material aspect of existence” (Bullock & Trombley, 2000, p. 564). The ontology of natural science is based in realism, with the assumption that the nature of reality is

apprehensible (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Natural science epistemology is dualistic and objective; therefore the research investigator (the knower) and that which is investigated (the known) are independent entities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Research within this paradigm is said to be objective, predictable and generalizable.

### *Human Science Paradigm*

In the nineteenth century, a paradigm that contrasted with the natural science paradigm was proposed by Dilthey, a German historicist (Northrup, 2003). Dilthey articulated that science is a process that “takes into account the uniqueness of human life, bound up as it is with historical memories, traditions, customs and language, and reestablishes its interrelation with knowledge” (Northrup, p. 40). This paved the way for a “second theory of existence, grounded in a human science tradition” (Northrup, p. 40). In other words, Dilthey proposed that human phenomena could not be predicted, controlled or regulated but required interpretation and understanding. In more contemporary literature, Van Manen (1997) asserted that developing the human sciences would facilitate the understanding of human experience. He also claimed that the lived experience was the phenomenon of concern to the human science perspective, which sought to understand and explicate the meaning of human beings.

Human science is concerned with the study of human beings and human experiences associated with the social sciences (Creswell, 1998). For example, qualitative methods such as grounded theory, narrative research, heuristic research, hermeneutics, qualitative descriptive, phenomenology and ethnography have their foundations within the social science perspective and are associated with disciplines of anthropology, sociology, psychology, education, as well as nursing. (Parse, 1998, 2001).

*Totality Paradigm and Simultaneity Paradigm*

Within the discipline of nursing, there are at least two paradigms articulated by Parse as the *simultaneity* and *totality* paradigms (Parse, 1987, 2001). These paradigms are of particular interest to me. Within the totality paradigm, a human is defined as a “biopsychosocioculturalspiritual being who can be understood by studying the parts yet is more than the sum of parts.” (Barrett, 2002, p. 52). In other words, the human being is considered to be separate from, while at the same time interacting with the environment. Inquiry into phenomena within the totality paradigm comes from the perspective that a person or parts of a person can be measured and studied under a controlled environment (e.g., natural science). I assert that the phenomenon of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died is incongruent with the totality paradigm because the description and exploration of the meaning of the experience of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died requires that the researcher engage with participants to hear their stories about their experiences, which cannot be divided into parts, nor measured in a controlled environment. As one participant expressed it,

... it'll just be something that I've always known but I never knew how I knew, and if it would come up I could never articulate the explanation for it or anything because I just know I don't need an explanation. I just know, but to convince you of what I know I need some kind of theory, explanation, whatever; and now science is starting to [recognize communicating with persons who have died] - there are articles coming out about [how] this is true... I feel really validated by that, because someone found the words to put with the feeling that I've always had that I just knew, and then that makes me more acceptable to mainstream people because some scientist said I'm okay now [laughing] it's true... (Janet, participant three, 2008)

As I see it, Janet’s perspective reflects the tension she feels between her own paradigm and how a science paradigm would articulate her worldview. For example, while her words subtly reject the idea of ‘truth’ (e.g., in the sense of her rejecting an understanding

there exists only one certainty concerning communicating with persons who have died), Janet's use of the word 'true' may indicate the powerful domination of natural science/realism worldviews in the background of her languaging habits, and a struggle for finding alternate wording.

The simultaneity paradigm considers a human as "irreducible" (Parse, 2001, p. 228), not separate from the universe, but an "indivisible cocreation" with the universe (Parse, 2007, p. 308). In contrast to the totality paradigm, a human is considered "more than and different from the sum of the parts" (Parse, 1987, p. 135). After exploring particular paradigms that shape knowledge development generally and nursing knowledge in particular, it became evident to me that the simultaneity paradigm resonates with my personal beliefs. Therefore, in this research the simultaneity paradigm provides the ontology, epistemology and research method to study the phenomenon of "keeping in touch" with loved ones who have died. Next I will further explicate the ontological and epistemological perspectives.

#### *Articulating My Chosen Paradigm as a Person/Researcher*

In my unfolding becoming as a person/researcher, the inquiry process of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died is a symphony of the senses that resonates with my unfolding knowing about being within the universe, and in discovering with others their unfolding knowing about being within the universe. All is One, we are One in our unfolding discovering and knowing of being (Personal journal entry, 2008).

At this point in my unfolding journey as a person/researcher, I have chosen the theory of humanbecoming (Parse, 2007) because the language of the theory closely resonates with the beliefs I hold about human being and unfolding knowledge. At the beginning of my graduate studies I encountered and became fascinated with the humanbecoming school of thought (Parse, 1981, 1992, 1998, 2007). This school

of thought has resonated with the illumination and transformation of my personal perception of my being and consequently has served as a foundation for my research study. My belief about being resonates with the theory of humanbecoming and is further illuminated by the belief that persons “live lives of Oneness with all that is” (Northrup, 2003, p. 43). My belief resonates with Parse’s evolving conceptualization of “indivisible cocreation” (Parse, 2007, p. 308). I believe that as we “live lives of Oneness” (Northrup, p. 43) we are connected; we are indivisible. I am interested in an area of inquiry that explores experiences of others. As I have engaged in my own humanbecoming, my values, beliefs and assumptions are founded in the notion of an interconnected web, which is cocreated, eternal, and infinite. I believe that unfolding knowledge is cocreated when persons share their experiences.

*Introducing the Humanbecoming School of Thought*

As I engaged more deeply with the ontology of the humanbecoming school of thought, it resonated with my beliefs.

When I read the humanbecoming school of thought the languaging provided wording for my thinking, speaking, exploring who I am and my being; the living of my past, present and future simultaneously, it also gave me a methodology to guide my research inquiry. When I read the following words, it was like the lyrics to the song of my research inquiry, my phenomenon of interest:

We coexist with those who have gone before us, those who are with us in the present moment and those who will join us in the future. Thus, we coexist with persons from our past, present, and future all-at-once. Persons who are grieving the loss of a loved one often speak of the presence of that person in the now moment.” (Pilkington & Jonas-Simpson, 1996, p. 5)

Yes! These words resonate for me ... like the sound of a crystal bell. (Personal journal entry, 2008)

The foundation for the theory of humanbecoming was based on assumptions about humans and becoming that resonated with Rogers’ (1970) principles and

postulates, and with existential-phenomenological thought, primarily of Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Parse, 1998). The (present) humanbecoming school of thought was named originally, in 1981, *Man-Living-Health: A Theory of Nursing*. In 1992 the word “man” was changed to a nongendered concept of human, with Parse further changing the wording of her theory to “human becoming”. In 1998, Parse expanded her original theoretical work to include three research methodologies as well as a practice methodology. These methodologies were ultimately embraced by a community of committed scholars, and as such, Parse’s considerable body of work was transformed into a school of thought (Parse, 2001), namely *The Human Becoming School of Thought* (Parse, 1998).

Articulating Parse’s body of work as a particular school of thought provides great contributions to the advancement of the nursing discipline because it offers a specific ontology, epistemology, and congruent methodologies for research and practice (Parse, 1997) that can aid in developing clarity and disciplinary agreement. For example, most recently, Parse’s work has been renamed *The Humanbecoming School of Thought* (Parse 2007), thus specifying the notion of indivisibility. Central to the ontology is the idea of “cocreating reality as a seamless symphony of becoming” (Parse, 1996). Four postulates of “illimitability, paradox, freedom, and mystery” (Parse, 2007, p. 308) are embedded throughout the theory. Thus the human becoming school of thought has an ontology based on assumptions and principles and unique language that differs from other nursing frameworks and theories (Parse, 1997).

### *Summarizing the Humanbecoming School of Thought*

The following will serve to describe aspects of the humanbecoming school of thought salient to the understanding of the theoretical context of my research on persons' experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who have died. I acknowledge that this brief summary will not serve to fully address the complexity of the humanbecoming school of thought, but rather will serve simply to introduce it here. In subsequent chapters, my analysis will rely on, and further expand, the manner in which understandings are cocreated through this school of thought.

*The four postulates.* The four postulates, namely *illimitability*, *paradox*, *freedom*, and *mystery* are embedded, but not identified in the actual principle statements within the theory of humanbecoming (Parse, 2007). Parse (2007) articulates illimitability as the “indivisible unbounded knowing extended to infinity, the all-at-once remembering and prospecting with the moment” (p. 308). The concept of illimitability is a notion that Parse (2007) describes of being “indivisible, unpredictable” and “everchanging” (p. 308). Paradox is articulated as “lived rhythms” rather than the reconciliation of opposing states of being (Parse, 2007, p. 309). Freedom “is contextually construed liberation” (Parse, 2007, p. 309). Parse explicates mystery as “the unexplainable, that which cannot be completely known unequivocally” (2007, p. 309).

These postulates harmonize with my inquiry into the phenomenon of keeping in touch with persons who have died. Study participants described and explored their experiences in ways that resonated with liberated indivisibility with their loved ones after death, they lived out rhythms with their loved ones in ways that they could not fully

explain. For example, in an interview with Mary, participant seven, while trying to explain what it was like to keep in touch with her son, Jason, she replied:

...in the dream, when somebody hugs you, to me it doesn't feel that different than when somebody hugs you in real life in the human form. But in the dream, it's just a little bit more of an intense feeling because you realize they're dead, your brain realizes that they're dead, but your heart of course doesn't. So the hug to me, would be more, I would use the word euphoric because I can't even think of a word that would be, there really is no human word.

This expressed to me the challenge of putting into words the concept of keeping touch which is permeated with an unexplainable, living rhythm of liberated indivisibility between a person and their loved one who died.

*Foundational assumptions.* The humanbecoming school of thought is founded on nine foundational philosophical assumptions (Appendix A), which Parse then synthesized into three assumptions. The three assumptions originally identified by Parse in 1992 were later updated (Parse, 1998, p. 29) and now read:

1. Human becoming is freely choosing personal meaning in situation in the intersubjective process of living value priorities.
2. Human becoming is cocreating rhythmical patterns of relating in mutual process with the universe.
3. Human becoming is cotranscending multidimensionally with emerging possibles.

In Parse's work, three major themes, namely, "*meaning, rhythmicity, and cotranscendence*" (Parse, 1987, p. 163) emerged from the above three assumptions. Parse further developed a principle from each theme, which I will discuss below; these principles comprise the theory of humanbecoming. Within each principle there are three significant concepts (also discussed below) that resonate with the meaning of the

principle (Parse 1981). Each of the concepts share interrelated meanings with each other. Each concept explicates fundamental paradoxes of humanbecoming (Parse, 1998).

It is important to note that Parse (2007), in her later work, made indivisibility more explicit by “specifying humanbecoming as one word and humanuniverse as one word” (p. 308). By blending words, for example, joining human and becoming to form humanbecoming and removing the hyphen in human-universe to form humanuniverse, the notion of indivisible cocreation was explicitly illustrated (Parse, 2007).

With ongoing revisions, some wording has changed within the original expressions of principles, “to elaborate certain truths embedded in the conceptualizations of the ontology” while at the same time maintaining the intent (Parse, 2007, p. 308). It is significant to note that while the principles of the theory are illustrated within this thesis as if discrete entities, for the purpose of study and application, in keeping with the notion of indivisibility, they are not intended to be considered separate or sequential.

*Principles, themes, and concepts.* As described above, Parse (1998) developed three principles, which emerged from the three themes (i.e., meaning, rhythmicity, and transcendence), the themes themselves having arisen from three foundational assumptions. Principle one, emerging from the theme of “meaning” is: “Structuring meaning multidimensionally is cocreating reality through the languaging of valuing and imaging” (Parse, 1998, p. 35). Principle two, emerging from the theme of “rhythmicity” is: “Cocreating rhythmical patterns of relating is living the paradoxical unity of revealing-concealing and enabling-limiting while connecting-separating” (Parse, 1998, p. 42). Principle three, emerging from the theme of “transcendence” is: “Cotranscending with the possibles is powering unique ways of originating in the process of transforming

(Parse, 1998, p. 46). As also mentioned above, Parse, (2007) changed the wording of the original three principles to reflect the evolving postulates of illimitability, paradox, freedom, and mystery discussed above. Thus, although the wording of the original three principles has been altered, the intent remains unchanged (2007).

Principle one, in its most recent articulation, states: “Structuring meaning is the imaging and valuing of languaging” (Parse, 2007, p. 309). This meaning involves both the “the linguistic and imagined content of something and the interpretation that one gives to something” (Parse, 1998, p. 29). Cody (1994) views meaning as continuously evolving “in the interplay of the familiar and unfamiliar” (p. 48). Meaning surfaces within the humanuniverse process as “meaning moments” of daily life and the “ultimate meaning of purposes in life” (Parse, 1998, p. 36). Meaning is “everchanging”; as “meaning moments change” through a person’s lived experiences, there is a shifting and change of “ultimate meaning” (Parse, 1998, p. 29). Humans have “illimitable options from which to choose” in the structuring meaning (Parse, 2007, p. 309). Within principle one, three concepts emerge: *imaging*, *valuing*, and *languaging*.

According to Parse (1981) the concept of imaging is “the cocreating of reality” which “structures the meaning of an experience” (p. 42). It is the “picturing or making real of events, ideas, and people” (Parse, 1987, p. 164). Imaging “is reflective-prereflective coming to know the explicit-tacit all-at-once” (Parse, 1998, p. 36). Further, Parse (1998) posits that explicit knowing is logically articulated and reflected upon critically. Whereas tacit knowing is “prearticulate and acritical” (Parse, 1981, p. 43), “quiet”, “vague” and, “hidden from reflective awareness” (Parse, 1998, p. 36). In imaging, persons come to know events, ideas, and people as being real for them as they

engage in the “reflective-prereflective coming to know the explicit-tacit all-at-once” (Parse, 1998, p. 36). The concept of valuing is “confirming-not confirming cherished beliefs in light of a personal worldview” (Parse, 1998, p. 38). The confirming of beliefs involves “choosing from imaged options and owning the choices” (Parse, 1981, p. 45). When cherished beliefs are chosen by an individual, “a matrix of principles and ideas” are formed that guide one’s life (Parse, 1998, p. 38). Languageing is the process whereby a person “symbolizes [his/her] unique realit[y]” (Parse, 1981, p. 47). Symbolizing occurs “in the process of speaking and moving” (Parse, 1981, p. 46). Persons engage in languageing by “signifying valued images through speaking-being silent and moving-being still” (Parse, 1998, p. 39). Parse posits that meanings of experience surfaced from cocreated images from one’s chosen values are symbolized through language (Parse, 1998). Symbols express meaning for persons. Persons share meaning with others through symbols such as words and gestures (Parse, 1981). Persons cocreate reality with others using symbols that express meaning (Parse, 1981, 1998).

While reflecting on what principle one means to me, I thought of my Dad’s ukulele. I cherish that little, brown, wooden ukulele, it has great significance to me. The “imagined content” within the meaning of the ukulele is music; the “interpretation” is how music gives me love and joy. I structure meaning from my dad’s ukulele from a cocreation of my past experiences, when my father and I laughed as he taught me to play it when he was alive, my present experiences seeing it lying silent and dusty from disuse, and my future plans to take lessons so that I can play more competently. Over the years, each time I look at the ukulele, I experience a different meaning moment. At first I used to cry because I missed my father. Other times I laughed because I recalled the funny

songs he taught me. Lately the meaning moments are shifting my ultimate life meaning; that music is and will continue to be a cherished aspect of my life. In imaging, I shape my personal sense of what is real for me. I picture the experience, the explicit, the critical, “I need to make more time to play the ukulele” and the tacit, that which is hidden from my knowing, yet, at the same time, my knowing that an aspect of my father and what we shared, lives in the ukulele. Thus in my imaging, I engage in the “reflective-prereflective coming to know the explicit-tacit all-at-once” (Parse, 1998, p. 36). I can express in words some of what I know about the meaning the ukulele has for me, yet there is a knowing that is unspoken. In languaging, I can express by “speaking-being silent” and “moving-being still” (Parse, p.39) in the telling and not telling about the meaning of my Dad’s ukulele to a friend. I can talk about the meaning, or play it in the presence of a friend. Or, I can not touch it and send a thought out to my dad for this gift of meaning. In valuing, I choose to live out my “cherished beliefs” (Parse, p. 37); my choosing to act based on some of my beliefs and not on others, ‘there’s no time to take lessons - there is still time’. I structure meaning about my Dad’s ukulele through languaging, valuing and imaging. I cocreate “realms of meaning” (Pilkington & Jonas-Simpson, 1996, p. 19) with my past, the “was” (Pilkington & Jonas-Simpson, p. 19), my Dad, my predecessor; my present, the “is” (Pilkington & Jonas-Simpson, p. 19), my friends, my contemporaries, those with whom I share memories about music with Dad; my future, the “will be” (Pilkington & Jonas-Simpson, p. 19), those who will teach me how to play the ukulele

Principle two, in its most recent articulation, states: “Configuring rhythmical patterns of relating is the revealing-concealing and enabling-limiting of connecting-separating” (Parse, 2007, p. 309). Rhythmicity is the “cadent, paradoxical patterning of

the human universe mutual process” (Parse, 1998, p. 29). The rhythmical patterning process is unrepeatable, “revealed and concealed all-at-once” as changes arise with new experiences (Parse, 1998). There is a paradoxical nature inherent in patterning. Rather than patterning in opposition, “dimensions of the same rhythm [are] lived all at once” (Parse, 1998, p. 30). Within the everchanging rhythmical patterning humans and universe are connecting and separating “all-at-once with ideas, objects, and situations, and are enabled and limited by ...all choosings” (Parse, 1998, p. 30).

Three paradoxical concepts articulated within principle two are *revealing-concealing*, *enabling-limiting*, and *connecting-separating*. Humans in “cocreating reality illimitably with paradoxical rhythms” engage in revealing-concealing, involving “disclosing-not disclosing”, enabling-limiting involving “potentiating-restricting” and connecting-separating involving “attending-distancing” (Parse, 2007, p. 309). The concepts of revealing-concealing, enabling-limiting, and connecting-separating are indivisible and paradoxical in nature and while each could be interpreted as representing opposites, they are “two dimensions of the same rhythms present all-at-once” (Parse, 1998, p. 43), one dimension foregrounding, the other backgrounding simultaneously in the moment (Parse, 1998). There are infinite possibilities as well as limitations in choosing whereby humans reveal and conceal themselves (Parse, 1987).

As I reflect on principle two, I ponder on how my mother and family members configured patterns of relating as she was dying. Within our patterns of relating, paradoxical rhythms were apparent, the ebbing and flowing, the foregrounding and backgrounding of revealing-concealing, enabling-limiting, and connecting-separating. When my mom was moved from the emergency unit to her room on the medical floor,

she expressed her pleasure to family members that she was moved to a private room (revealing) yet likely concealing her sorrow that this would be the room where she would eventually die. Mom's expression of pleasure was in the foreground while sorrow was in the background. She chose to have regular administrations of Morphine, which enabled her to breathe easier yet this limited her ability to be awake. The family members had opportunities to talk with her earlier and respected her wishes to die comfortably. They ensured that she had her Morphine regularly which enabled her comfort and recognized that this would mean limited opportunities to visit with her while she was awake. Mom expressed that she did not want to leave the family (connecting) yet she was prepared to die (separating). Mom exemplified grace and dignity throughout her dying while living the indivisible and paradoxical concepts of revealing-concealing, enabling-limiting, and connecting-separating.

Principle three, in its most recent articulation, states: Cotranscending with possibles is the powering and originating of transforming (Parse, 2007, p. 309). Parse (1998) describes transcendence as "reaching beyond with possibles", that is "the hopes and dreams envisioned in multidimensional experiences" (p. 30). Parse (2007) posits that the concept of illimitability articulates "indivisible, unpredictable, and everchanging" (p. 308) with more clarity than the concept of multidimensionally used in her earlier work. The new conceptualizations of the "humanuniverse", the notion of "indivisible cocreation" as well as "illimitability", the idea of "indivisible unbounded knowing extended into infinity" (Parse, 2007, p. 308), give greater depth and meaning to the process whereby possibles surface as options from which a human chooses ways of becoming (Parse, 1998). As the human "propels with the creation of new ventures",

shifting “the views of the now...expanding horizons and other possibles” (Parse, 1998, p. 30), cotranscendence with the possibles is the way the human universe “reaches and propels beyond” cocreating in the “changing of change” (Parse, 1998, p. 47).

The three paradoxical concepts within principle three are: *powering*, *originating* and *transforming* (Parse, 2007, p. 309). The concept of powering is human universe energy interchange; it is the process of pushing-resisting, through which being-nonbeing is affirmed-not affirmed (Parse, 1981, 1998, 2007). Parse posits “[t]hat [for] the human [to] exist means that the human is powering” (Parse, 1998, p. 47). The concept of originating “means creating anew” (Parse, 1987, p. 165), taking action to envision and choose ways of living. It is creating unique ways of distinguishing oneself through the paradoxical rhythms of certainty-uncertainty and conforming-nonconforming simultaneously in the moment (Parse, 1998). The concept of transforming is “shifting the view of the familiar-unfamiliar, the changing of change” (Parse, 1998, p. 51); the changing of change, or, “shift in one’s changing worldview is transforming” (Parse, 1981). Moreover, Parse (1981) asserts that once there is a shift to a new perspective, the person does not return to their old ways of viewing the world, but “can only move toward other possibles” (p. 65).

My discovery and ongoing exploration of the humanbecoming school of thought and how it reverberated with my own beliefs resonates with principle three. As I explored the languaging of humanbecoming school of thought, I found words that enabled me to conceptualize, analyze and synthesize my living within the notion of a cocreated reality. I can relate strongly to the notion of cotranscendence that is, an indivisible, unbounded knowing that extends into infinity, the reaching beyond with possibles in creating my

hopes and dreams. The notion of cotranscendence articulates the passion I feel for the limitless possibilities that can be cocreated with incarnate and discarnate persons in that which was, is and will be. In this way my life has infinite possibilities, which gives me infinite hopes and dreams. For me this means that my life is interconnected with others in an infinite web. It relates to my beliefs, values and assumptions that life is eternal. As I make choices in living the everyday I am in the process of becoming, which shapes and reverberates into my eternity. In “powering” I engage in “pushing-resisting”. For me, in my becoming I have, do, and will have to navigate between the “pushing”, striving, reaching toward my hopes and dreams, and “resisting”, seeking to confront my own doubts and fears, while making a stand when opposed, questioned, challenged by others. Navigating “pushing-resisting” enables my understanding of my “being-nonbeing”.

In exploring my “being”, I engage in ongoing learning regarding self reflective questions such as “Who am I?”, “What am I?”, “Who or what do I wish to become?” and my taking hold of that which I am and realizing that which I am not “nonbeing”. In “affirming-not affirming”, I explore aspects of myself that I know and accept while realizing that there are aspects of myself that I do not know and have yet to explore, that which cannot be affirmed. In my explorations within “powering” I flow with “originating”, the “creating anew” through my choosing ways of being, while dancing within the paradoxical rhythms of “certainty-noncertainty” and “conforming-nonconforming” harmoniously all at once in the moment. The notion of “creating anew” gives me eternal hope for my living. Life for me is truly wonderful because it can always be cocreated anew. This is a refreshing thought. Yet there are moments when I feel certain and moments when I feel uncertain of myself and my living. I engage in

questioning within my beliefs about being and unfolding knowledge. I believe it is that questioning which facilitates my certainty. Yet by being willing to engage in uncertainty I endeavor to question my certainty. By dancing between certainty and uncertainty I engage in powering toward the becoming of what I believe and who I am. It is this questioning that, I believe, facilitates my honesty and integrity of self and that of my inquiry into keeping in touch with persons who have died. In this inquiry I have navigated between “conforming-nonconforming”, exploring what I have, am, and will conform with and that with which I will not conform. The notion of conforming-nonconforming, for me, has to do with exploring the opportunities and challenges posed by myself and others. The navigating among this sea of paradoxes is my transforming. In transforming I dance within the “familiar-unfamiliar” and in doing so I am engaging and living the “changing of change”.

In summary, the three principles, the themes, and the concepts of the humanbecoming school of thought provide me with a language to explore and navigate the limitless eternal aspects of my living and my inquiry in this research study.

#### *Research Guided by the Humanbecoming School of Thought*

The theoretical and philosophical assumptions of the humanbecoming school of thought provide a solid foundation for my research regarding the experience of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died. My research topic was congruent with my beliefs, which resonate with the ontology and epistemology of the humanbecoming school of thought. The concept of keeping in touch through all aspects of being with a loved one who has died is congruent with a unitary ontology that describes humans as indivisible persons cocreating being in ways that are limitless, paradoxical, free and

embedded in mystery. Each participant described their meaning of cocreating being through their intention of keeping in touch with their loved one who had died. The phenomenon of keeping in touch with persons who died does not subscribe to traditional notions of linear time and space. The participants created meaning about their experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who had died, which in turn has the possibility of contributing to knowledge for others. I have chosen the humanbecoming school of thought as the framework for my study of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died because I value that research based on a nursing theory will contribute to the knowledge base of nursing (Cody, 1994).

#### *Summarizing Chapter One*

In this chapter I have introduced my thesis topic, the goals of the study, and the theoretical and philosophical foundations for my research on persons' experiences of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died. In the next chapter I will elaborate with a review of the literature, and in Chapter Three, I will further describe the methodology.

## Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature

In this chapter I will provide an introduction to my literature review, briefly state the purpose of the study, and explicate the structure for the literature review, providing a map of how the concept of keeping in touch was developed from existing literature.

### *Introduction*

Search terms for the literature review included ‘post death contact’, ‘post death communication’, ‘continuing encounters after death’, ‘paranormal experience of survival after death’, ‘continuing existence after death’, ‘continuing attachments after death’, ‘continuing relationships after death’, and ‘continuing bonds after death’, and ‘after death communication’. The General Social Survey in the United States of America (USA) polled 40,000 people from 1972 to 2000 and found that a belief in the ability to interact with persons who died was common (Park & Benore, 2006). According to psychologists Park and Benore (2004), the concept of continued relationship is based on the belief that persons who die continue to exist, and that bonds continue between persons and their loved ones after physical death. Furthermore, these authors assert that persons “maintain a literal ongoing relationship” with their loved ones who have died (Park & Benore, 2006, p. 3). Park and Benore (2006) conducted two empirical research studies. Both studies revealed that continued relationship is a “stable phenomenon that is present in both bereaved and non-bereaved” persons and is consistent with positive adjustment but unrelated to negative adjustment in persons, both the “bereaved” and “non-bereaved” (Park & Benore, 2006, p. 2). They recommended that qualitative research that explored the ways in which individuals describe their experiences of ongoing relationships would be beneficial.

Other disciplines such as medicine and psychology have engaged in ongoing disciplinary debate regarding the existence of a person after death, bereavement theory and after death communication. However, a review of international nursing literature uncovered a paucity of research regarding ongoing communication between living persons and their loved ones who have died, thus illustrating the relevance of this research.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this research study was to explore persons' experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who had died. Specifically, this study endeavored to describe and explore the meaning of the experience in which persons keep in touch with their loved ones after death.

#### *Structure of the Literature Review*

The following literature review will map out how I journeyed through the literature to explain how the concept of keeping in touch informed my inquiry into the experience shared between persons and their loved ones who died. The organization of this review was based on a concept analysis of theoretical literature posited by Walker and Avant (2005). Concepts are "mental constructions" that denote "categories of information" that comprise "defining attributes" (Walker & Avant, 2005, p. 63). According to Walker and Avant (2005), concept analysis is a methodical "linguistic exercise" to ascertain those "defining attributes" (p. 63). Similarly, Burns and Grove (1993) define concept analysis as a strategy by which "a set of characteristics essential to the connotative meaning of a concept is identified" (p. 173). In this research, concept analysis was used as a strategy to extricate defining attributes of concepts, which in turn

provided insight into the phenomenon of interest and the concept of keeping in touch. (Walker & Avant, 2005).

In the following literature review, empirical literature relating to each concept within the map was reviewed and subjected to critical analysis. In the analysis, concepts that linked to the notion of communication with persons who died within the scholarly literature of psychology, medicine and nursing were drawn out for careful review. Available resources from the years 1996 – 2008 were found through the following databases: CINAHL, EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, Pub Med, Health Source, and Web of Science. Literature sources will be discussed in order of increasing relevance to the meaning and currency related to phenomenon of ongoing communication between persons and their loved ones who have died.

#### *Discourse Relevant to the Literature*

Beliefs in “continuing existence” and the ability for “after death communication” have been described and explored in everyday discourse throughout the history of human kind. In the past, writers such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Longfellow, and Tennyson have made references to communication with persons who have died. Within the public domain, modern discourse that makes reference to communication with loved ones who have died can be found in plays (e.g., *Blythe Spirit* written by Noel Coward), music (e.g., *Forever Love* sung by Josh Groban) as well as popular literature. Guggenheim and Guggenheim (as cited in Daggett, 2005) interviewed more than 2,000 people in the United States and Canada regarding their experiences in relation to communication with persons who have died. The findings from this study were published in the popular book *Hello from Heaven*.

However, within scientific and scholarly discourse, the phenomenon of continuing existence has been debated. The following review will focus on literature that supported the phenomenon of ongoing communication with persons who have died. Empirical literature that opposes the possibility of this phenomenon will be introduced to the extent that it informed the concept development process.

Numerous studies in psychology, medicine, and more recently in nursing, have been conducted to explore the phenomenon of after death communication. Guggenheim & Guggenheim's 1996 research findings (as cited in Daggett, 2005) indicate that 67% of those who grieve, experience post death communication. Studies identify that this phenomenon is experienced by males and females of various ages, culture, and educational backgrounds (Klugman, 2006).

#### *Theoretical and Empirical Literature*

A literature search that encompassed psychology, medicine and nursing yielded particular terms that formed a pattern and ultimately a concept map based on the definitions, nuances of meaning, and their relationships with each other. The terms *continued or continuing existence, continued or continuing attachment, continued or continuing relationship, continued or continuing bonds, and after death communication* formed a particular pattern of meaning that led me to arrive at the concept of keeping in touch for my research study.

#### *Conceptual Analysis*

After analyzing the definitions, relationships, and assumptions of the concepts listed above, a concept map was developed for my proposed study. In the following pages, the concepts of *continuing existence, continued attachment, continued relationship,*

*continuing bonds*, and *after death communication* will be explored; relevant empirical studies pertaining to these concepts will be discussed. At the end of the discussion, the concept of keeping in touch will be introduced.

### *Continuing Existence*

To date, the term continuing existence has surfaced 24,900 times in the literature relating to the study of after-death phenomenon within the disciplines of psychology and medicine. The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines existence as “the fact or condition of being or existing” (Barber, 2001, p. 487). One definition of the verb continuing is “to persist in” (Barber, 2001, p. 306). Therefore, the combined definition of the concept of continuing existence in relation to after-death phenomenon would be to persist in being after death. The concept of continuing existence is based on the belief in an after life.

However, while the concept of continuing existence has served as a general construct in the study of after death phenomenon, it did not capture the meaning of the link between a person and their loved one who has died. After I reviewed the literature on continuing existence in more depth, the three concepts: continuing attachment, continuing relationship, and continuing bonds surfaced. These three concepts were used widely in this literature to address the link that exists between a person and their loved one who died.

### *Continued Attachment*

The word attach had its earliest meaning from Old French *atachier* or *estachier* which mean to “fasten” or “fix” (Chantrell, 2002, p. 34). According to Park and Benore (2004), the concept of attachment had its origins from attachment theory developed within the discipline of psychology. The concept of continued attachment (Field, Nichols,

Holen, & Horowitz, 1999) has been used in psychology to capture the experiential link between a person and their loved one who died. However, according to Park and Benore (2004), research studies of continued attachment have indicated that links between persons and their loved ones who have died can be manifested by a range of symbolic and literal experiences. Park and Benore (2004) reflected upon their own earlier study conducted in 1999. They stated that while the study data identified symbolic and concrete ways that persons maintained attachments with persons who died, they argued that the symbolic manifestations of attachment did not address the beliefs of a literal “ongoing and bidirectional connection between two beings” (p. 38). For this reason, Park and Benore (2004) suggested that research studies using the concept of continued relationships would be more appropriate to the phenomenon of ongoing bidirectional connection.

#### *Continued Relationship*

Park and Benore (2006) have used the concept of continued relationship in research to mean the “beliefs in the maintenance of relational bonds between the bereaved and the deceased in spite of their apparent separation at death” (p. 3). Numerous empirical studies regarding continued relationships have been conducted within the disciplines of psychology and medicine. Findings from these studies indicated that while these relationships were described as being qualitatively different after death, participants believed in a literal ongoing relationship with the person who died. For example, some participants described their relationships that existed in their mind or heart (Klass, 1993; Silverman et al., 1995) while other participants described conversations whereby they felt heard by and communicated with their loved ones (Yamamoto et al., 1969). Two

quantitative studies were conducted by Park and Benore (2006), to develop psychometrically sound measurements of beliefs of a continued relationship with persons who died. Some of the findings from this study revealed that participants believed they could communicate with a loved one who had died, and that a loved one who had died could communicate with their living loved ones. Moreover, participants believed that persons who have died are aware of what happens to their living loved one (Park and Benore, 2006).

The results of these studies substantiated the concept of continued relationship as being worthy of future research. There was widespread belief among the 144 participants, regarding the notion of continued relationship. However, it is important to note that these participants did not necessarily experience a relationship with a person who died. Park and Benore (2006) suggested that research is needed to explore the particular ways that living persons experience or frame their experiences, of a continued relationship with persons who have died. However, I found the idea of relationship problematic as a concept, for two reasons. First, the concept of relationship was broad and open to various possible interpretations in regard to the individual. According to the Canadian Oxford Dictionary (Barber, 2001) the definition of a relationship is “the fact or state of being related” or “a connection or association” (p. 1218). This definition opens up the possibility for a wide range of relationships (e.g., from spouses to professional relationships) depending on the values and beliefs of the person. Thus, as Park and Benore suggested, further research is needed to frame what qualifies as a continued relationship. Second, research findings as discussed above have yielded a wide range of ways in which continued relationships are experienced (e.g., symbolic or literal). This

was not helpful in relation to my study as I was, at the time of my (original) literature search and concept analysis, interested in literal and ongoing, not symbolic, experiences within ongoing relationships between persons and their loved ones who died. For the above two reasons, the concept of continued relationships did not serve my inquiry regarding the meaning of the experience shared between a person and their loved one who died.

### *Continuing Bonds*

The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines a bond as “a thing that ties another down or together” (Barber, 2001, p. 156). This meaning (when used within the concept of continuing bonds between a person and their loved one that died) suggested that ties remained after physical death. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Freudian psychology and medicine deemed that the breaking of emotional ties or bonds with those who had died was necessary to facilitate adaptive bereavement (Packman, Horsley, Davies, & Kramer, 2006; Rothaupt & Becker, 2007). However, within the 20<sup>th</sup> century, research facilitated a shift from the traditional theory of breaking bonds with persons who died, to research exploring continuing bonds (Stroebe & Schut, 2005). Research findings have demonstrated the benefits of maintaining continuing bonds after death for adults (Field & Friedrichs, 2004), parents (Arnold, Gemma, & Cushman, 2005), children whose parents died (Silverman & Worden, 1992), mothers and children (Ashton, 2007), and between siblings (Packman, Horsley, Davies, & Kramer, 2006).

A number of research studies in the United States and China have demonstrated the benefits of continuing bonds (Chan, Chow, Ho, Tsui, Tin, Koo & Koo, 2005; Foster, 2008; Klugman, 2006; Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gillies, 2006). Some identified benefits

were that participants found meaning in understanding the life of their loved one after death as well as finding meaning in their own life after their loved one died (Chan et al, 2005). For participants who were able to meaningfully make sense of the death of their loved one, they experienced “fewer symptoms of complicated grief” (Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gillies, 2006, p.735). Klugman (2006) identified that continued contact after death facilitated the maintenance of stronger ongoing bonds between persons and their loved ones who had died. Foster (2008) posited that continuing bonds might be a “coping strategy” for bereaved families, which could be of benefit to health and quality of life (p. 92).

Some of the methodologies used in qualitative research on continuing bonds include content analysis of questionnaires and interviews (Parker, 2005) as well as thematic analysis of interviews (Chan et al, 2005). Some of the quantitative studies regarding continuing bonds include grief inventories (Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gillies, 2006), mood scales (Field, 2004), and random telephone surveys (Klugman, 2006). Mixed method research that include quantitative and qualitative methods have supported the benefits of continuing bonds (Foster, 2008). One such mixed method study on continuing bonds within the discipline of nursing was conducted by Foster (2008). The primary purpose of this study was to explore continuing bonds in children with advanced cancer, as well as continuing bonds of parents and siblings in relation to children who died of cancer. A secondary purpose of this study was to explore the relationships among continuing bonds, coping strategies, as well as grief symptoms in parents and siblings related to a child who died from cancer (Foster, 2008).

Although current, popular bereavement theory has shifted to maintaining bonds, ongoing controversy remains within scholarly literature as to whether bonds with persons who died should be continued or broken. Stroebe and Schut (2005) conducted a review of opposing research within the continuing-breaking bonds controversy. The results of their review showed that it was not possible to conclude whether either continuing or relinquishing bonds was of benefit to the bereavement process. Stroebe and Schut (2005) suggested that further research as to how and for whom continuing or relinquishing of bonds facilitated the grieving process.

International research studies (Chan et al, 2005; Neimeyer et al, 2006) have been conducted regarding the ways in which continuing bonds facilitated the grieving process. Continuing bonds were either initiated by surviving persons, such as talking with the person who died (Chan et al, 2005), or initiated by the person who died such as appearing in dreams (Chan et al, 2005).

However, while study findings on the bidirectional nature of initiating bonds (e.g., either by surviving persons or persons who died) were similar in America (Klugman, 2006) and China (Chan et al, 2005), the study by Chan et al (2005) indicated that the ways in which continuing bonds are experienced are unique within the Chinese social culture. For example, Chan et al (2005) conducted research on the experience of Chinese persons who maintained continuing bonds with their loved ones after death. Cultural beliefs included the use of an alter through which the living spoke to ancestors who had died, and a Taoist belief that the loved one who died would return about seven days after death. However, Chan et al (2005) acknowledged a dichotomy in their analytic approach (i.e., separating findings according to who initiated communication – the living or the

person who had died). This approach to analysis was said to have influenced the findings, in that it “left out some of the possible forms of expression of continuing bonds” (p.943). Similarly, Klass (2006) posited that further study of continuing bonds within bereavement theory was needed. Additionally, he suggested the concept needs to be investigated in multifaceted, wider populations with varied cultural, political and historical aspects.

In summary, the concept of continuing bonds, similar to the concept of continued relationships and continued attachment, was a broad term, subject to many interpretations. Moreover, the literature (Klass, 2006; Neimeyer et al, 2006) suggested that further exploration regarding the applicability of this concept to wider populations was required. Consequently, further research was needed to surface the meaning of the concept of continuing bonds.

I concluded that the concept of continuing bonds did not serve my inquiry regarding the meaning of the experience shared between persons and their loved ones who had died for the following two reasons. First, authors, as cited above, questioned the utility of using the concept of continuing bonds with wide populations. Second, the concept of continuing bonds was broad and subject to various interpretations. Although the notion of continuing bonds addresses many concerns related to previously discussed conceptualizations, it was not a concept that was accessible to all humans. Accessibility is an important criteria in humanbecoming research, since, according to Parse (1992), “human-universe experiences are connected uniquely to give meaning to an individual’s life” (p. 37).

Based on the above review of the literature, I submit that the concept of continuing bonds as well as the concepts of continued relationships and continued attachments are broad concepts and subject to various interpretations and therefore would not have unique meaning; unique meaning is in keeping with the purposes of research based in humanbecoming theory. Therefore, based on observations drawn from the literature review and my commitment to engaging in research congruent with the theoretical and philosophical assumptions of humanbecoming theory, I required a different concept for my study. I needed a new concept that resonated with a universal human health experience and one that would facilitate inquiry regarding the experience shared between persons and their loved ones who had died.

#### *After Death Communication*

After death communication (ADC) has been defined as “an unexplainable phenomenon or occurrence that is understood by the bereaved to be a communication from the deceased” (Daggett, 2005, p. 191). An ADC is described as “signs or events that symbolize the relationship” or a communication that “hold[s] special meaning for the survivor” (Daggett, 2005, p. 191). A review of the research literature using the term after death communication yielded four studies within the discipline of nursing.

Devers and Robinson (2002) described a grounded theory study based on an earlier ethnographic study of ADC from the perspective and language of persons who experienced the death of a loved one. However, while the grounded theory study by Devers & Robinson (2002) illuminated processes such as “comprehending private reality” and “responding to public reality”, the study did not yield data on the quality of the after death communication itself. This was so, because the purpose of the grounded

theory study was to develop theory meaningful to practitioners and students regarding “bereavement responses” (Devers & Robinson, 2002, p. 252). Further, the notion of private and public realities suggested a dualistic perspective on ADC.

This perspective of private and public realities perpetuates what Howarth (2000, p. 135) identified as a “dominant discourse” based on the notion of boundaries between living persons and persons who had died. I submit that such discourse has the potential to objectify the experience shared between persons and their loved ones who have died. For example, research based on the theoretical perspective of boundaries between living and persons relates to a positivist paradigm. The epistemological base of such research is dualistic and objective in that the research investigator (the knower) and that which is investigated (the known) are considered independent entities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Research within this paradigm is said to be objective, predictable and generalizable, unlike research within my chosen methodology.

A study involving focus groups (Todaro-Franceschi, 2006) explored ADC by using the concept of synchronicity within a unitary nursing perspective. This study explored the experiences of synchronicity that assisted persons whose loved ones had died, to “reconcile paradoxical feelings about life, living, death, and dying” (p. 298). Similarly to my study, Todaro-Franceschi, explored the meaning of the experiences for persons whose loved ones had died, however, her study focused on co-incidental experiences, where my interest is in ongoing experiences. Daggett (2005) conducted a qualitative descriptive study to analyze and categorize the various modes of ADC. The study identified four categories of ADC (visions and dreams, lost-things-found, symbolic messages, and sightings) but no data were obtained regarding the quality of the

communication, nor the bidirectional connection between the person and the loved one who had died, as similarly identified by Park and Benore (2006).

It was encouraging to discover that the discipline of nursing was beginning to engage in research to advance knowledge regarding after-death communication in a broad sense as summarized in the literature review above. Recently, a study by Campbell (2008) explored the meaning of experiences with patients at the time of death or after death for critical care nurses. However, there is a paucity of nursing research on the meaning of the experience of ongoing communication shared between a person and their loved one who has died.

### *Keeping in Touch*

The concept of *keeping in touch* surfaced after thoughtful reflection and discussion with my thesis supervisor. Once my supervisor, Dr. Deborah Thoun, voiced the concept, it had a profound resonance with the nature of my inquiry. As I reflected on the concept of keeping in touch, it held a simple yet profound meaning for me. I felt that this concept would facilitate my inquiry exploring the experience of ongoing communication between persons and their loved ones who had died. That is to say, ties between persons and their loved one who have died, or after death communication, have been mainly defined as “an unexplainable phenomenon” (Daggett, 2005, p. 191). My chosen phenomenon of study went beyond the notion of the existence of a person after death, or the attachment, relationship, or bonds, and thus, my inquiry was concerned with an exploration of the meaning of the experience shared between persons and their loved ones who died.

The term “let’s keep in touch” is a common phrase expressed between at least two people who desire to maintain communication with each other when they are separated by distance. The ways in which living people “keep in touch” vary from hearing a voice (over the telephone) to seeing the person again (in a visit). I suggest that a parallel can be made between the varied ways in which living persons as well as persons who have died keep in touch with their loved ones. Varied ways in which persons and their loved ones who died maintained communication have been described by Daggett (2005), Klugman (2006), Normand et al. (1996), and Yamamoto et al.(1969), for example, feeling a touch, seeing/feeling a presence, hearing a voice, and having a conversation. The word touch means to “bring (two things) into mutual contact” (Barber, 2001, p. 1534). The senses provide ways in which persons can be in contact with their surroundings and with other people. Hearing the voice or smelling the scent of a loved one, are possible ways in which persons can feel connected. Therefore the concept of keeping in touch resonated well with the notion of communication through and beyond the physical senses.

I believed that the common phrase, keeping in touch, in a research question would be more familiar to potential participants than phrases such as continuing bonds or continuing attachment used in scholarly discourse. Keeping in touch is at a level of abstraction that can be apprehended easily by participants. Moreover, as stated above, the study of the phenomenon of the experience shared between persons and their loved ones who have died required a concept that related to a universal lived experience. Within the Parse (1998) qualitative research method, the phenomena under study are “universal experiences described by participants who [live] them” (p. 63). Some examples of “universal lived experiences” considered as phenomena are “hope, joy-sorrow,

contentment, grieving, and suffering” (Parse, 1998, p. 63). I believed that the concept of keeping in touch was a universal lived experience, as it resonated with the notion of communication through physical senses common to all humans.

The concept of keeping in touch has the potential to develop into a new discourse used in bereavement. Howarth (2000) has critiqued the ways in which dominant discourses within medicine and science in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have created boundaries between life and death. Howarth (2000) stated “[n]ot only have we subscribed to the boundary between life and death but we have looked to professionals and experts to define, mediate and police that boundary for us.” (p. 135). I posit that by using the common phrase, keeping in touch and thus introducing a new discourse in bereavement, it would promote an emerging discourse that serves to break the traditional boundaries between life and death. Moreover, the words keeping in touch may contribute to new language that can be used to create bridges between persons whose loved ones have died and professionals so that persons can feel more secure to disclose the experiences they have with their loved ones who have died. According to Howarth (2000)

What may, or may not, be ‘healthy grieving’ will depend upon the psychological, emotional, and social impact that a continuing relationship may hold for a bereaved person. Essential to this awareness is recognition of difference and the need to develop new, complex concepts and approaches that may aid understandings of the *differentiated* experiences of bereaved people. For we are not forging *new* links with the dead. We are not discovering *new* relationships with but uncovering a layer of communication which has until now been viewed as deviant or pathological and therefore hidden. The task now is not to produce a ‘new model of grief’. Rather it is to amplify the whispered communication across the boundary between the living and the dead that has hitherto been muffled by the noisy dominant discourse and prescriptive professional rituals of modernity. (p. 135)

I believed that the concept keeping in touch would facilitate inquiry into the experience of communication between persons and their loved ones who have died.

Specifically, it would address the bi-directional communication between living persons and persons who have died (Park & Benore, 2006). Moreover, using the words keeping in touch had the potential to address desires of the living person as well as the person who had died to remain in communication with one another.

Fisher (2001) states that from an ethical point of view, the dead can be harmed if their transcendent desires are not met after death. Fisher defines transcendent desires as desires that can be experienced whether or not the person is living or dead (e.g., the desire to be cremated after death). Therefore posthumous harm is possible based on the notion that pre-death desires if thwarted can harm the deceased. From this ethical point of view, research on communication between persons and their loved ones who have died would need to address the notion of transcendent desires. For example, if Albert expressed the desire to communicate a message such as “I love you” to his wife because she was not present at the bedside while he was dying, one could say that there would be an ethical obligation for the nurse to follow through on his transcendent desire. From another point of view, a nurse researcher who engages in inquiry that explores the experience of bidirectional communication between persons and their loved ones who have died, is fulfilling her/his ethical obligation to acknowledge the potential transcendent desires of loved ones who wish to keep in touch. Thus, in discussing contemporary grief theory and in presenting what she calls an unconventional view, Fisher (2001) states, “When the interests of the dead are promoted, not only is the ongoing connection between the living and the dead respected, but also the dead are benefited” (p. 568). Within this point of view, I believed that the concept of keeping in

touch would serve to facilitate exploration of the meaning of the experience of persons and their loved ones who wished to continue communication with each other after death.

In conclusion, a review of the literature within psychology, medicine and nursing served to assist me to develop the concept of keeping in touch. This concept facilitated my inquiry into the experience of communication between persons and their loved ones who have died. The concept of continued attachment used in research studies to date has not addressed the literal ongoing bidirectional connection after death. Researchers have suggested that both the concepts of continuing relationship and continuing bonds need to be framed more clearly and the quality of the communication between persons and their loved ones who have died need to be explored. The concept of ADC has been used in nursing research, however, this concept is broad. Research findings from studies to date have explored the general experience of ADC and the processes of bereavement. However the concept of ADC has not served to illuminate the meaning of the experience of bidirectional communication between persons and their loved ones who have died.

#### *Summary of Chapter Two*

In this chapter I explicated the structure for the literature review, and provided a map of how the concept of keeping in touch was developed from existing concepts within relevant research literature pertaining to my research inquiry. In Chapter Three I will explicate the methodology used in this research study.

### Chapter 3: Explicating the Methodology

In a world where concrete evidence-based practice is becoming increasingly relished, I often wish that those who have died would reveal themselves more often, just to let those of us nonbelievers know that there really is much more to it all than we could ever imagine. It is not valid to say we must see it to believe it; sometimes you just sense it or somehow know it. We would not have the things we have today if it were not for the many visionary individuals who had the audacity to dream. (Todaro-Franceschi, 2006, p. 297)

#### *Introduction*

Visionary nursing researchers, such as Todaro-Franceschi (2006), who work within a human science perspective, are contributing to knowledge development regarding the phenomenon of after death communication. These researchers have inspired me as I have engaged in inquiry that journeyed beyond the boundaries of life and death within the traditional natural science perspective. In this chapter I will explicate my study design, participant selection and protection, objectives and research questions, and processes of data gathering and analysis-synthesis.

#### *Explicating my Study Design*

##### *Science and Sciencing*

Polifroni and Welch (1999) describe the aims of pure natural science as the “pursuit of knowledge and the attainment of truth” as well as “the description, explanation, prediction and control of events” (p. 2). According to Parse (2001), natural science fails to illuminate the meaning of the human experience. Natural science reflects the Cartesian dualism of a subject/object split (Polifroni & Welch, 1999), which has limitations when engaging in inquiry regarding the meaning of human experience. The phenomena of human experience is “acausal, reflecting the idea that humans cocreate experiences in mutual process with the universe” (Parse, 2001, p. 2). The term *sciencing*,

originated by White in 1938 (as cited by Parse, 2001, p.1), has been developed by Parse as an alternative approach to science. Sciencing (Parse, 2001) is a process of inquiry concerned with exploring “meanings, values, and relationships” in order to understand the nature of human experience. Parse asserts that the process of sciencing does not pursue absolute truths (Parse, 2001). According to Parse (2001), the concept of sciencing explicates a qualitative approach to research inquiry. Parse (2001) identifies four assumptions that form the basis of sciencing. The assumptions are as follows:

1. To question is to reach beyond what is with what is possible.
2. A question in itself incarnates the questioner’s attitudes, beliefs, and style and points to personal projects.
3. Both questions and answers are set with the boundaries of the questioner’s understanding of the phenomenon.
4. The questioning process and the answers are intersubjective. (p. 2)

In the inquiry I describe below, I aspire to understand and illustrate fulfillment of these assumptions.

The phenomenon of interest, keeping in touch with persons who have died, was explored in this study within the ontological and epistemological views of the humanbecoming school of thought, which resonates with the simultaneity paradigm and the human science perspective. Within the process of sciencing in my research study, I engaged in inquiry concerned with exploring the experience of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died.

### *Question for Research*

In qualitative studies, the research question surfaces from the phenomenon in which the researcher is interested. What the researcher is interested in knowing more

about resonates with the ontological perspective of the researcher (Parse, 2001). As stated in Chapter One, to some, the notion of communicating with persons who have died is not within their beliefs; that is, it seems impossible. This was not my perspective. Thus the research question in this study (i.e., What is the meaning of persons' experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who have died?) reaches beyond, to seek out what is possible, according to my beliefs and interests.

My research question was originally titled *The Experience of Keeping in Touch With Persons Who Have Died For Persons Who Have Lost a Loved One*. I had taken care to frame my research question because I recognized that it would serve as a “guide... through the research” process (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 4). I believe that the researcher's way of thinking affects the construction of the research question (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). During the analysis-synthesis process, I noted that the use of the word *lost* was incongruent with the intended purpose of this study, the participant descriptions of their experiences, and the languaging of humanbecoming.

The word *lost*, in the phrase “for persons who have lost a loved one” in my original title, suggested that the loved one had not been *found* by the participants. Indeed, the intention of this study was to engage in inquiry with participants who continued to keep in touch with their loved one following death. Therefore, loved ones in this study were not lost to the participants. In Chapter Four, the findings will demonstrate that all the participants in this study maintained an ongoing relationship with their loved ones following death. Jonas-Simpson and McMahon (2005) posit that attention to language is imperative, as it “cocreates human experience” (p. 126). Thus, including the word *lost* would be incongruent with the participants' experience of keeping in touch with their

loved ones. In Chapter One, I described the concept of languaging. According to Jonas-Simpson and McMahon (2005), languaging is about how humans express meaning. Languaging “tells about the ways people structure their realities and cocreate human experiences” (p. 124). Therefore, in order to maintain congruency within humanbecoming and the experiences of the participants in this study, the research question was changed to facilitate exploring persons’ experiences of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died.

#### *Descriptive Exploratory Methodology and Rigour*

Parse’s descriptive exploratory methodology surfaced from the descriptive method, which originated in the social sciences (Parse, 2001). However according to Parse (2001), “a discipline-specific theoretical perspective, such as a nursing theory can be used as a conceptual framework to guide” research studies within the discipline of nursing (p. 57). According to Parse (2001), the research question leads to a method. I have chosen a descriptive method for this study as it facilitates an intersubjective questioning and answering process to explore the phenomenon of keeping in touch.

The descriptive method is fundamentally concerned with the lived experience of humans (Mitchell & Cody, 1992). The purpose of the qualitative descriptive method is to engage in inquiry that uncovers patterns and themes relating to the phenomenon of concern to the researcher (Parse, 2001). The descriptive method has three underlying assumptions: “1) Humans create social networks, 2) Humans can describe retrospective and prospective life events, 3) Patterns and themes surface through intense study of phenomena” (Parse, 2001, p. 57). These three assumptions are congruent with my research inquiry. Thus in my study, I used Parse’s descriptive exploratory methodology

within the qualitative descriptive method. The descriptive exploratory methodology focuses on uncovering the meaning of the human experience through interview.

According to Devers and Robinson (2002), qualitative methodologies are based on the “existence of multiple realities that are continually being constructed and revised” and are relevant to “explore phenomena that have not been fully described, that are social and interactional in nature and are both complex and multifactorial” (p. 242).

Parse (2001, pp. 58-59) identified the following seven processes specific to descriptive exploratory studies:

1. Planning a coherent design to ensure scientific merit.
2. Specifying the participant group.
3. Planning for the protection of participant’s rights.
4. Gathering data....
5. Analyzing-synthesizing data....
6. Discussing findings in light of the disciplinary perspective guiding the study.
7. Recommending further research.

Following Parse’s seven processes has helped give order to my research, and I have adopted them as a means of attending to substance and clarity throughout this research study.

### *Appraising Methodological Rigour*

As I engaged in the process of sciencing using the descriptive exploratory methodology for this study, I was mindful of the need for methodological rigour. According to Creswell (1998), over time, scholars have explicated different processes for critical appraisal of verification or rigour within qualitative research. One such process

for verification identified by scholars is the use of criteria (Burns, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 1994, Lincoln, 1995; Parse 2001). For me, Parse's criteria were relevant, since, as discussed earlier, the process of inquiry in this study is concerned with exploring participant meanings of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died. This study is framed within the theory of humanbecoming, which is situated in the simultaneity paradigm, whereby the human being is in indivisible cocreation with the universe (Parse, 2007). The unitary nature of the human being is the primary focus of research (Bunkers, Petardi, Pilkington, Walls, 1996; Parse, 1989; Parse 2001). According to Bunkers et al. (1996) "the researcher...believes in the personal meaning each individual attributes to lived experience" (p.35). Therefore, within the theory of humanbecoming, truth is the described lived experience of the person in indivisible cocreation with the universe. Thus, qualitative research, in keeping within the process of sciencing, does not pursue absolute truths (Parse, 2001). It follows then, that to employ positivistic or objectivistic criteria using concepts such as reliability or validity, would be incongruent with the foundational assumptions of the theory of humanbecoming that is the framework for this research study.

Parse (2001) asserts that critical appraisal is imperative in judging the merit of scholarly work. Early in the planning process for my research study, I chose to use the specific criteria developed by Parse (2001) for appraising the quality of a qualitative research (Appendix B). Parse (2001) submits these criteria can be used to explore the "substance" and "clarity" of qualitative research. I believe that Parse's criteria provide a congruent framework to facilitate a scholarly process for this research study.

According to Parse (2001), standards of substance and clarity strengthen the logical flow of qualitative research. Parse (2001) contends that substance means the “soundness and comprehensiveness” of how the phenomenon is presented, and the “accuracy of the supporting evidence”, as well as the “semantic consistency” at each of the different “levels of discourse” (p. 243). Parse posits that clarity means the “logical flow of ideas, appropriate grammatical expressions, and technical precision” (p. 243). I have endeavored to demonstrate attention to substance and clarity throughout this research study.

Parse’s criterion for appraising qualitative research is based on four dimensions that correspond to processes of research, namely: “conceptual, ethical, methodological, and interpretive” (2001, p. 244). This study conscientiously addressed these four dimensions.

### *Conceptual Dimension*

The phenomenon of study is the experience of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died. The experience of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died is relevant to the discipline of nursing because it resonates with the human-universe-health process, which as I understand it, is Parse’s central phenomenon of nursing science. Keeping in touch with loved ones who have died has to do with the human process of persons living their values as they choose among life options. Within the theory of humanbecoming, living one’s values is an expression of health.

Inquiry within this research study is based upon the theoretical framework of humanbecoming, a frame of reference specific to the discipline of nursing. This theoretical framework serves as a guide from the beginning of the inquiry process, the description of the phenomenon of study, to the conclusion of the process whereby

findings are identified. The research study question, “What is the meaning of persons’ experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who have died?” resonates within a nursing frame of reference and is congruent with the theory of humanbecoming. Further, I submit that the research question for this study is applicable when using a descriptive exploratory study and suitable when engaged in inquiry that explores the meaning of an experience or event for persons or a group of individuals who may share a similar experience (Parse, 2001).

### *Ethical Dimension*

One of the ethical standards identified by Parse (2001) is that qualitative research demonstrates scientific merit. In this study, I addressed the standards required for scientific merit by rigorously attending to the descriptive exploratory processes explicated by Parse (2001). This study contributes to knowledge specific to nursing by providing new understandings of this phenomenon, within the theory of humanbecoming. The inquiry contributes to unique knowledge for nursing, as findings are analyzed-synthesized using a theoretical framework specific to nursing. Knowledge related to the experience of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died has the potential to shape the ways in which nurses and nursing students choose to practice.

Establishing scientific merit was particularly important to me in my learning as a novice researcher in relation to the phenomenon of keeping in touch. The concept of keeping in touch with persons after death assumes that a spiritual relationship exists between a person and their loved one who died. Smith (1999) asserts that “spiritual relationships [within] the universe”. . . ha[ve] been difficult for Western systems of knowledge to deal with or accept” (p. 74). This phenomenon of concern is political

because it may potentially be challenged by the public and within the inherent hierarchies of academia. As stated by Howarth (2000), the traditional dominant discourse within medicine and science has been to maintain boundaries between the living and the dead. I have experienced this dominant discourse as a person, nurse educator and researcher.

I have been fascinated by the comments and questions made by others during my researching process. Questions such as “Have you been able to find enough participants for your study?”, “You are courageous”, “I am surprised that the university would let you do that topic”, “How does that research topic relate to nursing?” As I reflected on these comments and questions a number of thoughts came to me. I have encountered many people who want and need to talk about their experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who have died. I received many responses from people who wished to participate in this study. Those with whom I talked with had expressed their gratitude and/or support for research in this area. Others expressed how important it was for healthcare providers to hear about these experiences. Other people spontaneously began to tell their stories of keeping in touch with their loved ones who had died when they heard what my research study was about. As I listened to others, I thought, there seems to be such a need to share their experiences. As they told their stories, themes of healing, joy, comfort and gratitude came with these experiences and it was clear that this experience was a natural part of their lives. These stories were in sharp contrast to the frightening depictions of after-death communication by popular television shows. I have been truly grateful for the openness and support of my professors during my graduate studies and the opportunity granted to me by the university to conduct this research study. (Personal journal entry, 2008)

*Scrutiny.* In this study, I have considered possible scrutiny in two ways. Firstly, following the rigorous process of the descriptive method has strengthened my ability to answer scholarly questions posed by researchers who operate within other worldviews. This research study has followed the criteria for appraisal of qualitative research posited by Parse (2001) in order to ensure congruence and consistency between the ontology, epistemology, and the methodological design (Appendix B).

The second way I have addressed possible scrutiny is by developing an audit trail during my process of research. I have been vigilant in order to “avoid the distortions” within my methodology, “limit[ing my] conclusions carefully” so that I will be prepared

to answer the questions regarding the credibility of my research (Becker, 1967, p. 216). I have written journal reflections on my research process, taken notes of meetings, resources and resource people, and have been mindful to unpack my assumptions in my “conceptual baggage” in order to generate ideas for possible challenges (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, pp. 49-50).

I considered myself to be an insider as well as an outsider in this research (Smith, 1999). I was an insider as I have experienced keeping in touch with my loved ones who have died. I was an outsider, as I was engaging in the role of researcher. Throughout this research study I was mindful of how my personal experiences as well as my beliefs and assumptions might influence my role of researcher. Journaling during this process assisted me to engage in “reflexivity” in order to reflect and think critically about the need for respectful, ethical relationships with the participants, “my taken-for-granted views”, and the possible risks and consequences associated with insider research (Smith, 1999, pp. 137-139). Although my journal has not been submitted as research data, excerpts have been included in my thesis to discuss my insights as a person and a researcher. I have been confident that credibility has been maintained within my research process, as my thesis committee members are reputable nursing scholars, who demand rigour.

*Protection.* In this research study, to ensure that the participants were protected, a number of processes and requirements posited by Parse (2001) were fulfilled, as well as those of the University of Victoria. Thus an ethical process was maintained in the following ways: the research proposal was scrutinized to ensure that a high ethical standard would be maintained during the study, a formal informed consent was obtained

in a manner that ensured participants felt free to voluntarily participate in and/or withdraw from the study, and vigilant attention to maintaining the comfort, anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

*Ethical review.* Prior to conducting this study, approval was granted by the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) at the University of Victoria in 2008. I adhered to all processes and protections identified in the University of Victoria ethical review application throughout this study. As part of my learning process I reviewed other research studies related to graduate work within the humanbecoming perspective (Hutchings, 2003; Schick Makaroff, 2005; Tschanz, 2006; Campbell, 2008), and consulted with my thesis supervisor and supervisory committee.

*Process.* As stated above, advertisements were posted in three free local newspapers (Appendix C). Potential participants expressed their interest in the study by leaving a message on a telephone answering machine. The formal consent form explicated the nature of the study, processes to confirm ethics approval, measures to ensure ongoing anonymity and confidentiality, as well as the potential benefits and risks of the study. All the participants read the invitation to participate (Appendix D), and signed a consent form (Appendix E) stating they understood the conditions of participating in the study and had been given the opportunity to have any questions answered to their satisfaction. As well, they received a copy of the consent, which included the names and contact information of the researcher and/or a member of the supervisory committee. In addition, the consent form specified that there was no obligation to participate in the study and that the participants were free to discontinue involvement in or reschedule interviews related to the study without explanation or

consequence. All participants were reminded that they could contact me or my thesis committee members at any time, if concerns surfaced for them after the interview.

The participants completed a demographic data questionnaire (Appendix F). As Kirby and McKenna (1989) assert, there is responsibility associated with the new knowledge generated from research and that new knowledge is not “easy to bear and can sometimes lead to major changes in the lives of both...” the researcher and the participant (p. 107). Therefore, in addition, each participant was provided with a list of names and telephone numbers of available professional counseling services to contact if needed (Appendix G).

In keeping with Parse’s conceptualization of dialogical engagement (Parse 1995), as a method of discourse between participant and researcher, the meetings were established to ensure comfort, mutual convenience of time and location, privacy, emotional disclosure, mutual safety and professional conduct and minimal interruptions during the session. The sessions were scheduled over the course of fifteen days. Each participant confirmed that the location and time for the discussion was acceptable. The settings for the interviews ranged from private homes to a quiet area in a library, recreation center, and office. Participants agreed to meet either in the morning or afternoon. Interviews lasted from 28 minutes to 98 minutes. The sessions started and ended when each participant indicated it was appropriate. Both the participants and I had the option to request a second discussion to give further depth or clarity of descriptions. One was repeated because it failed to be digitally recorded. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. Two second interviews were necessary in order to obtain more detailed descriptions and explorations of objectives two and three of this study.

*Anonymity and confidentiality.* Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was maintained through several measures as identified in the informed consent (Appendix D) and according to the requirements of the HREB (University of Victoria, 2008). In particular, I did not disclose the identities of any participants. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants as well as their loved ones who had died, and identifying details were altered or removed from transcripts, participant introductions, descriptions, and quotes. Pseudonyms will be maintained in all subsequent presentations and/or publication of findings. Signed consent forms were kept separate from the study data. I was the only person responsible for transcribing data from the digital recordings to paper.

Digital voice recordings containing transcribed data were coded. I listened to the digital recordings repeatedly to check that the interviews were transcribed verbatim and took note of significant pauses and the tone of voice. Digital voice-recordings, CDs, and transcripts were kept by the researcher in a locked box in a locked filing cabinet. A list of participant names, contact information, demographic data, signed consent forms, and corresponding code numbers were kept in a locked box in a locked filing cabinet by the thesis supervisor. My research supervisor received printed copies of the anonymized transcripts from the interviews of eight participants (including the two second interviews). As stated above, one transcript was eliminated. The researcher and the researcher supervisor were the only persons to read and analyze the data. The transcriptions were available upon request to the members of the supervisory committee. The digital voice recordings and any CDs containing transcribed data will be erased, consent forms and transcripts will be shredded and recycled and computer files will be deleted following completion of secondary analysis or if it is decided by the researcher

that the data from this study will not be used for secondary analysis. The list of participant names and contact information will be shredded following successful defense of this thesis.

*Consent.* The potential benefits of this research study were identified in the consent form. The potential benefits for the participants were to have the opportunity for someone to listen to their descriptions of their experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who had died as well as the opportunity to reflect on their personal meaning of keeping in touch. The benefits to society were to provide research findings that inform the general public, nurses and nursing students, educators, and institutional administrators, of the experience of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died. Moreover, the benefits to disciplinary knowledge were to contribute to knowledge development that extends the limited yet growing scholarly work related to the experience of continued contact between persons and their loved ones who have died. This work intended to legitimize the experience of keeping in touch for many people and to enhance capacity to raise awareness of this often hidden or invisible experience. These findings will offer new insights and understandings that may have usefulness for professional nursing practice, education, policy development and further research.

Potential risks related to participating in this research included: an emotional feeling of being upset, or a physical feeling of being fatigued when talking about keeping in touch with a loved one who died. In order to prevent or address these risks, the plan was to stop the interview until the participant felt more settled and after settling, ask if they wished to proceed with the interview. None of the participants in this study indicated and/or expressed the need to stop due to feeling upset or feeling physically fatigued.

*Analysis-synthesis.* The findings of this research illuminated the ways that study participants described their experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who died. In this analysis-synthesis process, descriptive paragraphs reflective of the participants' statements are provided to substantiate major ideas common to all participants. Then, major ideas are analyzed-synthesized to develop three themes corresponding to the three research objectives. Participant quotes are used throughout Chapter Four. Thus, the reader has the opportunity to appraise whether the study data have been accurately and authentically presented and to discern how well findings are supported by the data gathered from each participant.

#### *Methodological Dimension*

The purpose of my research was to explore persons' experiences of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died. In particular I was interested in exploring descriptions of the ways in which participants keep in touch with their loved ones and the meaning these experiences have for them. Inquiry regarding the descriptions and meaning of experiences is located within and is congruent with the human science perspective (Parse, 2001). Qualitative methods located within this perspective are concerned with illuminating meanings of human experience. I chose the descriptive exploratory methodology advanced by Parse (2001) to guide my research study as this methodology resonated with the nature and purpose of the phenomenon of interest in my research.

*Population.* The population for this study was adults who experienced keeping in touch with their loved ones who had died. During the recruitment process, I described the experience of keeping in touch as feeling, hearing, seeing, knowing, or speaking with a loved one who had died. It was discussed and clarified with all potential participants that

the phenomenon of concern in this study was their experience of keeping in touch with loved ones such as family or friends rather than keeping in touch with persons who had died within other situations, such as the situation whereby the participant is working in the capacity of a medium who contacts persons who have died for clients. All participants who volunteered in this study described their own experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones, specifically family members.

Eligible participants for the study were English-speaking adults, over the age of nineteen, from the general public and self identified as keeping in touch with their loved ones who had died. No preference was given to race, ethnicity, class, level of education, position, gender or religion. I ensured that I did not include any student with whom I had currently or previously had an instructor/student relationship. All participants volunteered and gave verbal and written consent after being asked if they felt comfortable to be interviewed at that particular time following the death of their loved ones. Parse asserts that there is no specific number of participants required to fulfill the demands of exploratory research studies (2001). This is so, as the purpose of findings is to reflect data shared by the research participants only, and findings are not meant to be generalized to any other individual or group. Similarly, Kirby and McKenna (1989) contend that adequate information is more important than a particular number of participants.

Eight participants were interviewed. However, unfortunately, it was necessary to eliminate one transcript from the study, as the participant was unable to focus her discussion on the purpose of the study. Despite attempts to redirect her attention to the purpose of the study she gave no information regarding the objectives of the study. She gave details regarding her personal life story, and her experiences prior to the death of her

loved one. She was unable or unwilling to describe her experience of keeping in touch despite numerous attempts to refocus the discussion on keeping in touch with her loved one who had died. Therefore this research study was based on discussions with a total of seven participants. Several other people expressed interest in participating in this study if there was a need to extend the study or if additional participants were required. I originally chose to meet with eight participants for two reasons. First, I was a novice researcher learning how to interview in a way that was congruent with the qualitative research approach of the descriptive method. There was a possibility that the first session would likely be used as a learning experience and may or may not be included in the accepted seven interviews. Second, I decided that a larger sample size than the minimum of three (Park & Benore, 2006) may provide a broader base to explore the human experience of keeping in touch.

*Recruitment.* Participants were recruited by posting advertisements in local newspapers. This secular approach was an attempt to minimize or nullify specific religious affiliations (such as Protestants, Catholics and Jews) that represent the highest percentages of people who experience contact with the deceased (Park & Benore, 2006). In qualitative research dialogue, text or art forms can be used to describe the experience (Parse, 2001). However, for the purpose of this study the participants volunteered to a digitally recorded participant-researcher interview.

*Participants.* All seven participants in this study were women, and will be introduced in Chapter Four. Demographic data were obtained for the purpose of describing the backgrounds of persons who keep in touch with loved ones who have died. The ages of the seven participants in this study ranged from 23 to 85. One participant was

23 and one was 85. Three of the participants were in their forties. Two participants were retired. Participant occupations included: writer, retired dental hygienist, retired civil servant, financial services representative, retail, cook, medical laboratory assistant/sign language interpreter. Educational backgrounds included: Baccalaureate degrees, university course study, certificate granting education related to specific work, and high school diplomas. All participants were Canadian and spoke English as their first language. Cultural backgrounds of the participants included: Cree/Welsh, Irish, English, Ukrainian, German/Austrian/Russian.

*Dialogical engagement.* In meeting with participants I endeavored to engage in “true presence” (Parse, 2001, p. 170). In true presence the researcher fully engages with the participant. Rather than directing the session with questions, as a researcher I endeavored to enter “the flow with each participant” as she described the meaning of keeping in touch (Parse, 2001, p. 170). My intention during each discussion was to cocreate an atmosphere that was relaxed and open. I endeavored to develop rapport and actively participate within the session rather than assume a neutral distant position (Oakley, 1990). Rather than asking questions that interjected particular ideas during an interview, I stated questions such as “Can you say more about ...?” with the intention to “move the discussion” forward or facilitate the participant to describe or explore the meaning of keeping in touch at a deeper level (Parse, 2001, p. 170).

I prepared for each session by centering myself (Parse, 2001). I made notes before, during and after regarding my thoughts, feelings and learning. Reviewing the first digitally recorded interview with my supervisor was beneficial to my learning as a novice researcher. In subsequent discussions with participants I integrated my learning from my

first interview. Specifically, I learned how to ask questions in a more relaxed, less formal manner and to discern whether each of the three objectives was addressed in the natural flow of the participant descriptions. A question such as “What’s it like to keep in touch with ....?” was posed at the beginning of the session. Subsequent questions were asked based on the spoken and unspoken cues of the participant (Mason, 2002). During the session I asked “open-ended” questions that went along with the flow of the conversation rather than “close-ended” questions (Babbie, 1986, p. 127) in order to encourage rich descriptions of keeping in touch. I was careful to use “simple language” (Moser & Kalton, 1971, p. 6) in my questions and avoided asking “leading questions” that directed the responses of the participant (p. 8).

In the descriptive exploratory research methodology questions asked of participants are consistent with the overall structure of the study. The structure of the study was based on the original research title: *The Experience of Keeping in Touch With Persons Who Have Died for Persons Who Have Lost a Loved One*, as well as the theoretical themes of humanbecoming. Having built the study on the original title is significant because it led me to frame the research objectives in keeping with the notion of participants having lost a loved one, and required me to address my evolving understandings of the effects of the word *lost* as I moved from the data into the analysis-synthesis, as I will show in Chapter Five. The research objectives and interview questions of this study were developed from the theoretical themes of humanbecoming (Parse, 1996, 2001). As described earlier, the three theoretical themes of meaning, rhythmicity, and cotranscendence came from the philosophical assumptions of humanbecoming. Each theoretical theme was the basis for each research objective. The interview questions

emerged from each objective. The three objectives and corresponding interview questions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Study Objectives and Interview Questions*

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Objective 1: To describe the meaning of keeping in touch with persons who have died for persons who have lost a loved one.

Interview Questions:

- a. What is the meaning for you of keeping in touch with your loved one who has died?
- b. Please describe what keeping in touch with your loved one is like for you.

Objective 2: To describe patterns of relating within the experience of keeping in touch with persons who have died for persons who have lost a loved one.

Interview Questions:

- a. How does keeping in touch with your loved one influence the ongoing relationship you have with him or her?
- b. Please describe your ongoing relationship with your deceased loved one.

Objective 3: To describe personal hopes, concerns, possibilities of what might be in relation to keeping in touch.

Interview Questions:

- a. How does keeping in touch shape your hopes and dreams related to your loved one who has died?
  - b. How would you describe any concerns you may have related to keeping touch with your loved one who has died?
-

*Analysis-synthesis.* I applied the process specifically established by Parse (2001) to analyze-synthesize the data from the interviews. The stages of data analysis-synthesis described by Parse (2001; Parse, Coyne, & Smith, 1985) were followed. First, I listened to the digital recordings several times during the transcription process. I reviewed my interview notes as well as read the transcripts several times during the analysis process. Second, interview data were analyzed to find and extract the words, phrases and sentences of the participants that surfaced and resonated with the theme for each objective. The data from each interview were analyzed separately. Third, the data excerpts were condensed into descriptive paragraphs relating to each of the three objectives. Fourth, the descriptive paragraphs were analyzed-synthesized to develop a descriptive statement, in the language of the participant; this became a theme for each objective. Fifth, the theme, in the language of the participant, was translated into the language of the researcher, which synthesized the data at a higher level of abstraction. Steps two, three, four, and five analyzed each interview individually.

The process for analysis-synthesis of the themes was ongoing and iterative. In a sixth process, all the themes in the language of the participants were analyzed together for interplay, in order to illuminate a theme, in the language of the participant, common to all seven participants. Seventh, the themes in the language of the researcher were analyzed for interplay in order to describe a theme in the language of the researcher, common to all seven. In an eighth process, the descriptive paragraphs and thematic statements in the languages of participants and researcher, were then moved to a higher level of abstraction through analyzing-synthesizing a common theme in the language of the theory of humanbecoming. Ultimately, all the descriptive paragraphs and themes at

each level of abstraction were analyzed-synthesized together and final statements of findings were reported.

It is significant to note that the stages of analysis-synthesis process as described above were iterative and interwoven. Thus, the steps within the analysis-synthesis process of the descriptive exploratory methodology have been conscientiously followed and articulated in this study. Chapter Four illustrates the connections between participant descriptions and themes in the language of the participants, the language of the researcher and the language of the theory in order to provide an audit trail for the reader to follow the analysis-synthesis process.

In this study, the research question arose from the theoretical perspective and the interview questions arose from the research objectives which relate to the three themes of humanbecoming theory namely: meaning, rhythmicity and transcendence. The major ideas common to all research participants were analyzed-synthesized into themes, which provide the study findings. Therefore, there is a logical coherence within the study, from the research question through to the findings.

#### *Interpretive Dimension*

The descriptive exploratory methodology within the theory of humanbecoming is distinctly “different from other qualitative methods” (Parse, 1987, p. 177). One distinct difference is the processes for interpretation of the participant data. These processes include both the extraction-synthesis process and heuristic interpretive process (Parse, 1987; Parse, 1992; Parse, 1995). Within both processes, the ideas extracted from participants’ described lived experiences are “taken up to the theory level, ... woven together with specific concepts of theory” (Parse, 1992, p. 42), and moved into the

language of the science (Parse, 1987). Thus the analysis-synthesis process within this study is an interpretive process whereby participant data are reinterpreted into the language of the theory.

In other words, in the analysis-synthesis process in this study, the participants' described experiences are reinterpreted using different language and moved up levels of abstraction within the theory of humanbecoming, to create new theoretical understandings. It is incongruent within the analysis-synthesis process to verify findings with the research participants in order to demonstrate rigour, as in the case of other qualitative research studies. For example, research objective two corresponds to principle two of the humanbecoming theory. The main theme of this principle is rhythmicity, which involves rhythmical paradoxical patterns of relating with loved ones who have died. The participant data for objective two were reinterpreted to address paradoxical patterns of relating. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for the participants to verify the interpreted and reinterpreted themes for objective two which have been rewritten using language articulating the paradoxical nature of lived experiences with their loved ones who had died. Moreover, according to Parse's criteria (2001), the focus of interpretive rigour is substance and clarity (described above, under Appraising Methodological Rigour), not validity.

In this study, interpretive rigour is illustrated in Chapter Four. The interpretation of the three themes of this research is illuminated by the theoretical framework that underlies the conceptualization of this study. I have articulated these themes distinctly and provided discussion substantiated by participant statements and quotes in Chapter Four. Study findings are linked to the principles of the theory of humanbecoming and

explored in light of relevant research and theoretical literature. Chapter Five will discuss heuristic implications of this research in relation to practice, education and research.

*Summary of Chapter Three*

In this chapter I have explicated the study design for inquiry regarding Persons' Experiences of Keeping in Touch With Loved Ones Who Have Died. I have described my processes for participant selection and protection, the research objectives and interview questions, and the processes of data gathering and analysis-synthesis. The findings from the analysis-synthesis process will be presented in Chapter Four.

## Chapter 4: Presenting Study Findings

The descriptive exploratory methodology has been the compass to guide the navigation of my ship of inquiry through the relatively uncharted waters beyond the traditional boundaries of life and death (Personal journal entry, 2008).

### *Introduction*

The words ‘sacred sciencing’ surfaced for me at the beginning and throughout my experience of the analysis-synthesis process in this study.

There have been many moments within this research process that I have felt a profound sense of reverence. I recall the feeling I had after the first interview, as I sat looking at the digital recorder in my hands – this little device holds the precious words of a person who entrusted her profound story of her experiences of keeping in touch with her husband after death. I have been privileged to receive her beautiful gift, her words, her voice, her inflections, her pauses, her tears and laughter. Within this stream of sound and silence flow the vibrations that carry aspects of herself and her husband. I feel a deep sense of honor as well as responsibility that comes with this gift!...

During the transcription process, I lit a candle in honor of each loved one who died yet still live. As I listened to the recording and typed each transcript I would glance at the burning candle by my laptop, very aware that I needed to be conscientious in ensuring I transcribed each precious word that was entrusted to me, this transcript would be a reflection of aspects of the participant’s life and the life of their loved one. I had moments of laughter, tears and contemplation as I typed. The participant’s words painted descriptions of their experiences, their feelings, and their meanings, vivid images came alive on the canvas of my mind. The transcribing process for me held many sacred moments. I thought, this transcript represents a person and their loved one who continue to keep in touch after death. ...

During the analysis-synthesis process I have experienced a plethora of feelings, reverence, wonder and an overwhelming responsibility to the participants and their loved ones to do my best to represent them and what they had to say to me and to those who will read this thesis. At times, I think, this data deserves years of analysis-synthesis. And yet, I must complete this thesis. I shall do my best. (Personal journal entry, 2008)

The intention of this chapter is to present the findings from this research study.

Presentation of the study findings will unfold in a way that is congruent to both the methodology and the theoretical framework of this study. According to Parse (2001), study findings are interpreted in “light of the original conceptualization and requires

connecting the identified themes to the discipline-specific frame of reference” (p. 59). Thus, within this descriptive exploratory methodology, findings are analyzed-synthesized in light of study objectives; in this research, three principles of humanbecoming underpin these objectives (see Chapter One). The analysis–synthesis process is reflexive. It involves immersion in the data and the theory. Therefore, data from the transcripts were organized under the three research objectives for this study. Next, descriptions were synthesized from data. Themes for each participant description were articulated using words from the participants’ language, the researcher language, and the language of the theory. Specifically, each theme in the language of the participant was “synthesized to construct a descriptive statement in the language of the researcher” which was then written in the language of the theory (Parse, 2001. p. 59).

Seven study participants and their identified loved ones will be introduced. A description of keeping in touch extracted from each interview will be presented. Themes that emerged from the analysis-synthesis of the data will be identified. Quotes will be included from the seven participants. The quotes will illuminate and substantiate the common themes that surfaced from participants’ descriptions of keeping in touch. The overarching findings that answer the research question will be provided. During the analysis process, I discovered that on some level there was inseparability between the assumptions and principles within humanbecoming theory. Therefore, there is the possibility that the data may be relevant to more than one theme. Decisions regarding which data related to which objectives were made with painstaking thoughtfulness. Also, careful attention was given to ensure the words of the participants were used to develop the participant themes. For the purpose of this thesis, the words signs and symbols will be

used interchangeably, as both were used by the participants. Themes that mutually resonated among all seven participants for each of the three principles will be presented using language of participants, the language of the researcher and the language of the theory.

*Introducing Participants, Their Loved Ones, and Descriptions of Keeping in Touch*

It has been an honor and a privilege to listen to and write about the experiences of the study participants and their loved ones. They have been an inspiration to my ongoing reflections about the meaning of life and death. The names of study participants, their loved ones that they keep in touch with, as well as the names of other persons and places referred to in the interviews have been replaced with pseudonyms. Choices for pseudonyms were based on the names of people that I have known, loved and/or been inspired by throughout my life. It is important to note, that in the process of introducing the study participants and their loved ones, I was mindful of respectfully describing them as unique persons, while keeping details to a minimum in order to maintain their anonymity. Also, it is important to note that both Eileen (participant five) and Mary (participant seven), experienced keeping in touch with more than one loved one. However, the loved ones described below were included in the study because the data corresponding to them addressed the three objectives for the study and represented ongoing (more than one) experiences of keeping in touch that were spontaneously and personally experienced by the study participants themselves rather than identified by psychic or facilitated by a medium.

*Introducing Beverly, Participant One*

Beverly was the first person to volunteer to participate in this research study. She is in her early sixties, is a retired health care professional and practiced Reiki for 25 years. She described her religious affiliation as Christian. Beverly offered to have the interview in her bright and comfortable living room. As a novice researcher, I was grateful for her forthright, articulate way of describing her experiences and feelings regarding the phenomenon of keeping in touch and how she gave a summary at the end of her responses in relation to the interview questions. Beverly has kept in touch with her husband Bert for two and a half years, since his sudden death. She had kept a journal of her experiences of keeping in touch. Beverly described Bert as a man who enjoyed the outdoors. She stated that she was “convinced” that Bert “had a hand” in her meeting the new man in her life.

*Introducing Kathy, Participant Two*

Kathy welcomed me into her living room on two occasions. The warmth of the fireplace and homemade cookies created a cozy setting for our interviews. Kathy volunteered to be interviewed twice as the first interview failed to record. As there were no technical reasons to explain this occurrence, Kathy laughed at hearing of this failure, stating that it would be so like her father to play such a trick and erase the first interview, as he liked to play practical jokes. Kathy expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to participate in a second interview, grateful for the opportunity to describe her experience of keeping in touch more fully. Kathy is married, in her late forties and works as a health care professional. She describes her religious affiliation as one that resonates with Buddhist beliefs. Kathy has kept in touch with her father, Tom, since his death when

she was 18 years old. At that time her father went missing after a storm arose while on a routine fishing trip. Although her father's body was never found, Kathy maintained hope for 10 years that her dad could still be alive. She preferred to say that her father went "fishing for life" rather than use the word "death". She spoke of her dad as a dedicated father and her experience of keeping in touch as "heartfelt".

*Introducing Janet, Participant Three*

Janet and I had our interview in her living room over tea. She served Tetley Tea because it was her mother's chosen brand. Janet's descriptions of keeping in touch were forthright and articulate. Janet is in her early forties; she is a single parent of two children, who works as a writer. She stated that she did not have a religious affiliation. Janet stated that she has kept in touch with her mother, Joan, for about eight and a half to nine years. Janet said that she was an only child, and Joan was also a single parent. She stated "it was pretty much me and her against the world". Joan died the day before Janet's birthday.

*Introducing Helen, Participant Four*

Helen found a quiet space in a library where she felt comfortable to give her interview. Helen is in her mid eighties; she is retired, and describes her religious affiliation as a Spiritualist. After reading the advertisement in the newspaper, Helen, contacted me and volunteered to be a participant in this study. Her descriptions of keeping in touch were vivid. She spoke about the pleasure these experiences gave her. Helen has kept in touch with her son Robert for the past five years. Robert and Helen lived in the same home for many years. She said "we had a very close relationship in

life”. Helen stated that Robert “was ill for three years before he died”. She stated he “had a wonderful life ... he really loved his life and where he lived”.

*Introducing Eileen, Participant Five*

Eileen is in her mid twenties. She arranged for us to meet in a private setting at her place of work. She described her religious affiliation as “Gnostic Christian”. Eileen had a cheerful manner and gave detailed, well-articulated descriptions of her experiences of keeping in touch. Eileen’s grandfather Dan died in another city nine months ago. She stated his death “was very sudden and very unexpected ... I sat there and I talked with him”. Eileen requested that he give her a specific sign (the scent of wood shavings, oil and cigarette smoke that she knew from his workshop in the garage). She expressed to her grandfather Dan “that’s what I want, if you can send me that smell, so that I know that you’re okay”. Eileen stated the next day her grandfather fulfilled her request.

*Introducing Doris, Participant Six*

Doris, in her early forties, has a husband and daughter and works in the service industry. She describes her religious affiliation as living by the “golden rules”. Doris and I agreed to meet at a recreation center for the first interview and a restaurant for the second interview; she stated she felt comfortable in both settings. Doris has kept in touch with her mother for a year and five months. Her mother died about one year after being diagnosed with her illness.

*Introducing Mary, Participant Seven*

Mary invited me to her home. A lovely picture of her son hung in a prominent place in the living room where we had our interview. Mary is in her late forties; she lives with her husband and children, and she works in the retail industry. She described her

religious affiliation as “spiritual”. Mary’s descriptions of keeping in touch were detailed and articulate. She has kept in touch with her son, Jason, for about five years. Sadly, Jason was killed in a car accident, after a party, a week before his grade twelve graduation. Mary states that the designated driver after the party was drunk. She stated, “I don’t look at Jason as being dead, which, to some people would really scare them I think because they would probably think that I wasn’t moving on”. Mary and Jason share a close relationship. During her visits with Jason, she describes his affectionate way of being and wonderful sense of humor. She described Jason’s personality as a “little guy” with a “big voice”, a clown and prankster with everyone. Mary expressed that she treasures her experiences of keeping in touch with Jason.

### *Focus*

Although several participants spoke about keeping in touch with a number of people who had died, the focus of this study was on participants’ direct continuous contact with a particular loved one. In other words, keeping in touch for participants in this study was a very personal experience between each participant and one loved one.

### *Analysis-Synthesis of Participant Data, Related to Study Objectives*

Findings analyzed-synthesized from each participant’s interview data are presented below as descriptive paragraphs. The descriptive paragraphs relate to the objectives for this research. Themes relating to each study objective are identified, further analyzed-synthesized from each description. Quotes from each participant are illustrated to substantiate each theme in the language of the participants relating to the three study objectives. In keeping with the methodology (see Chapter Three), the themes are expressed in the language of the participant, of the researcher, and the humanbecoming

theory. Therefore the themes in the language of the participants are rewritten so as to move up levels of abstraction into the language of the researcher and then the language of humanbecoming theory. Also presented below are overarching thematic statements common to all participants that further abstract the findings and answer the research question. These overarching themes are framed in the language of participants, researcher, and the humanbecoming theory.

*Findings Related to Study Objective One*

In this research, Objective One is: to describe the meaning of keeping in touch with persons who have died for persons who have lost a loved one. Each of the seven participants' interviews surfaced data relating to study Objective One.

*Descriptions Related to Objective One: Beverly, Participant One*

Beverly described experiences that linked her to her husband and gave her comfort such as hearing the sound of a bell, smelling the scent of stale car fresheners, seeing him in the room, feeling his arms around her, the touch of his hand, and him beside her. She also described struggling with what she considered to be his dark side; expressing concern over events such as seeing him in dreams that she considered to be 'not in a nice way', for example, seeing him shaking his finger at her.

*Themes Related to Objective One: Beverly, Participant One*

Language of the Participant: Treasured signs and unpleasant events give rise to comfort and concern

Language of the Researcher: Cherished-vexing ciphers and occurrences engender ease-unease

Language of the Theory: Valuing Imaging

*Descriptions Related to Objective One: Kathy, Participant Two*

Kathy spoke of keeping in touch with her father who had died about 30 years ago through humorous events, dreams, and symbolic representations. She laughingly described how he continues to play practical jokes and tricks on her that are intended to elicit a reaction. She spoke of how she loses and finds objects, like her keys and important papers, as indicative of his practical jokes. Similarly, she associated the erasure of her previous interview recording (something that happened without any technical rationale to the interviewer) as a practical joke that her father could have set up. Further, Kathy offered a detailed description of a mass of seagulls that swirled above her wedding ceremony during the sharing of vows, only to move on abruptly at their conclusion. She stated that she recognized the seagulls as a heartfelt sign of her father's presence and believed this to mean that he approved of her wedding.

*Themes Related to Objective One: Kathy, Participant Two*

Language of the Participant: The continuation of heartfelt contact surfaces with symbolic events

Language of the Researcher: Enduring commitment abides with cherished ciphers and occurrences

Language of the Theory: Valuing Imaging

*Descriptions Related to Objective One: Janet, Participant Three*

Janet described finding objects such as a valued piece of a diamond willow tree, which is considered to be a rare find as it is not native to her current geographic location. She further described experiencing events such as having three otters swimming beside her as she walked along the beach, only to have them exit the ocean to sit beside her when she stopped. Janet stated that this event occurred on the day after her mom died

which was also her 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday. Janet spoke about these objects and events as being symbolic of her mother's presence, events that occurred during particularly difficult times when she missed her mother and felt 'down'. She spoke of these as joyful gifts that she considered to be loving symbols offering her comfort that brought about a sense of being 'all filled up' and replenished. She talked about feeling cocooned in overflowing love and warmth at these times.

*Themes Related to Objective One: Janet, Participant Three*

Language of the Participant: Loving symbols and events give rise to replenishing joy during difficult times

Language of the Researcher: Consoling ciphers and occurrences engender disconcerting-uplifting moments

Language of the Theory: Valuing Imaging

*Descriptions Related to Objective One: Helen, Participant Four*

Helen spoke about the happiness she felt when sensing her son's broad shoulders around her, knowing that he was laughing, and remembering conversations with him. She described symbolic events such as her television and lights flickering in her home, which she said brought attention to her son's presence as she linked these events with his interest in electrical endeavors. At such moments, she spoke to her son, laughingly telling him to leave her television alone.

*Themes Related to Objective One: Helen, Participant Four*

Language of the Participant: Happiness comes with treasured symbols and distinctive events

Language of the Researcher: Joy abides with cherished occurrences and discerning ciphers

Language of the Theory: Valuing Imaging

*Descriptions Related to Objective One: Eileen, Participant Five*

Eileen described feeling her grandfather's presence in a dream and other events as comforting signs that brought peace. She talked about requesting a precise sign from her grandfather after he had died that would be indicative of his well-being. She went on to describe the exact combination of scents comprised of wood shavings, oil, and cigarette smoke that were specific to him that she experienced the day following his death. Eileen said that although she was sad that her grandfather was gone she was also happy because he is not gone. She described feeling her grandfather near her when she found a Christmas snowman that her grandfather made for her out of wood. She was grateful to have rediscovered this treasure that offered an opportunity to feel his presence once again.

*Themes Related to Objective One: Eileen, Participant Five*

Language of the Participant: Comforting signs and events surface peace and sadness

Language of the Researcher: Consoling ciphers and occurrences offer joy-sorrow

Language of the Theory: Valuing Imaging

*Descriptions Related to Objective One: Doris, Participant Six*

Doris spoke about asking her mother to send her a sign from "the other side" and went on to describe the signs she has received from her. She talked about these signs as being out of the ordinary, unexpected and humorous. She identified how a recording of her daughter singing "Row, row, row your boat" spontaneously started playing when she was in the room and her astonishment based on the understanding that this music could only begin playing if it had been switched on manually. This song had special meaning for Doris as her mother loved to listen to her granddaughter's version of the song, which

gave her great joy. Also Doris heard rhythmic knocking on the bathroom door where she was talking secretly with her husband in an effort to keep her daughter from hearing their conversation. The sound of the knocking brought feelings of surprise and laughter for Doris. She stated that the number and sequence of the knocking sounds were the same as she used to hear as a child on her bedroom door. She stated that when she was a child, her mother would rap on the door communicating to her that she was aware of Doris doing something that she was not supposed to do.

Doris also spoke about talking with her mother before driving over mountainous roads, asking for clear weather, hearing her Mother's voice telling her to keep her eyes on the road, and always experiencing clear weather at these times. Similarly, before going to bed, she would ask her mother to appear to her in dreams, and would experience her mother appear to her at a distance in dreams. Doris also described certain life events that she saw as coincidences that she attributed to her mother. For example, spontaneously asking a customer his name at work and hearing him respond with her mother's first and last names. Although a seemingly simple coincidence for many, Doris considered this occurrence to be a special sign from her mother. Doris stated that talking to her mother, hearing her mother's voice, and receiving signs have given her comfort, laughter, and a feeling that she is not alone and her mother is watching over her.

*Themes Related to Objective One: Doris, Participant Six*

Language of the Participant: Distinctive events signal continuing joy and security

Language of the Researcher: Consoling mirthful ciphers and occurrences engender perpetual safekeeping

Language of the Theory: Valuing Imaging

*Descriptions Related to Objective One: Mary, Participant Seven*

Mary said that she does not look at her son as being dead. Although she spoke of feeling alone, isolated, and needing to be secretive when experiencing events with her son, she also described feelings of ecstasy, euphoria, intense love, humor, comfort, curiosity, amazement, and healing. Mary described dreams with her son, smelling the scent of his Swiss Army cologne, seeing him in full physical form, seeing and feeling his hand touch hers, feeling a hug, a kiss on the cheek, and her hair being touched. She also described a sensation of having someone sitting on her lap or sitting on her feet. Mary went on to speak of receiving great comfort from various experiences with dragonflies, knowing that her son delighted in them. She described one occurrence on the second anniversary of her son's death when a dragonfly entered her home and landed on her chair where she sat crying. She considered all of these events to be supportive visits from her son.

*Themes Related to Objective One: Mary, Participant Seven*

Language of the Participant: Cautious yet intense comfort and support comes with loving signs and events

Language of the Researcher: Guarded elation abides with consoling ciphers and occurrences

Language of the Theory: Valuing Imaging

*Common Themes Related to Study Objective One*

Each of the Objective One theme groups (participant, researcher, theory) for each of the participants was analyzed for interplay, in order to illuminate themes common to all seven participants. Common themes are expressed in the language of the participants, researcher, and theory of humanbecoming.

Common Theme in Language of Participants: Treasured events and signs give rise to lasting comfort

Common Theme in Language of the Researcher: Cherished ciphers and occurrences engender solace

Common Theme in Language of the Theory: Valuing Imaging

### *Participants' Voices*

The common themes for Objective One related directly to what the participants said in our recorded discussions. For example, Beverly, Participant One, said:

Comfort and encouragement ... I think it was his way of saying that he loved me...there were incidents that happened, a bell outside my gate ringing that the wind can't ring, you'd have to have someone rattle it...a sense of arms around me, but the thing that's really very clear...[is] the smell, it's just so definite and it's so strong.

Kathy, Participant Two, said:

Sometimes keys would go missing and end up in the weirdest spots and that would be him [her father] up to his practical jokes... The seagulls behind us [and] feeling the presence of my father at the wedding...heartfelt ...it was comforting, it was like he approved.

Janet, Participant Three, said:

It's comforting...it's a comfort to know that when I really need her [mother] she's still there ... if I'm feeling really down like oh I really want my mommy I can feel her hugging me like I can be enveloped in that love...Eight or nine years after my mom died, at the same spot where we had the celebration [in memory of her mother after she died], I found a piece of diamond willow...that kind of wood is significant to me and only grows in [another province], how the heck does a piece of diamond willow from [another, landlocked province] get to the beach?....

Helen, Participant Four, said:

It's wonderful, if I hadn't kept in touch, I wouldn't know that he was alright ... You can feel a presence...the television would flicker ... You could put that down to all kinds of causes...but you automatically know that when that happens you think of him. ... You feel his presence, you feel his broad shoulders, you know that he's laughing ... I'm happy he's OK.

Eileen, Participant Five, said:

Sad because he's gone [her grandfather] but happy because he's not gone...[After] the crying jag [when she was told her grandfather died]...I talked to him...it was really nice to be able to have that sense of complete knowledge and know ... that he could hear me... I said 'You know what would be nice, if you could just give me a sign that ... you're OK'... the next day I got that scent of his garage and it was exactly the same smell and ... It was very peaceful. Very comforting, ...when I opened the Christmas box and I pulled out this little snowman he [her grandfather] made.

Doris, Participant Six, said:

Comforting, because they may not physically be here but you know that they're still here ... We have a little picture cube that has a thirty-second sound bite ... and all of a sudden it started to play. ... She [her mother] loved hearing that little thirty second clip ... at first I was kind of taken aback ... I laughed ... then ... it made me feel good that she was still around ... comforting ... just because before she passed I asked her if there was anyway you can send me a sign ... when she really needs me to hear something she kind of blurts it out in my head...you know 'eyes on the road' it made me ... it [referring to the sound of her mother's voice in her head] just made me chuckle...OK, I'm listening...it's good to know she is still around... there is a part of her here to keep an eye on us.

Mary, Participant Seven, said:

When I feel his [her son's] presence around me ... I would get a smell first of all ...it's a feeling of comfort. ... I'll feel my hand being touched, other times. ... I've actually felt him kiss my cheek. ... In the dream when somebody [referring to her son] hugs you ...it's just a little bit more of an intense feeling [than the smell or touch] ... the hug, to me, would be more, I would use the word euphoric. ...On the second anniversary of his death, I was ...crying ... a dragon fly ...flew in, it flew past [her husband] standing at the top of the stairs...and landed ...on the back of my chair, ... so the whole family came, and stood behind the chair and looked at the dragonfly ... it sat there for quite a long time ...it just made me feel that he [her son] understood my pain, and my grief, and that he was there to support me, and it was a visit. And that was all I needed to get through that day ... It made the day easier....

Thus the participants' words substantiate and make clear the themes associated with humanbecoming theory.

*Findings Related to Study Objective Two*

In this research, Objective Two is: to describe patterns of relating within the experience of keeping in touch with persons who have died for persons who have lost a loved one. Each of the seven participants' interviews surfaced data relating to study Objective Two.

*Descriptions Related to Objective Two: Beverly, Participant One*

Beverly spoke of enjoying a changing relationship with her husband that was diminishing over time yet ever-present when she was in need. She described concern over her husband's ability to find his way in death while believing that he was concerned about how she was handling life events, such as her legal affairs. Over time she felt reassured by him, sensing that he approved of the legal arrangements she was making. Gradually, her confidence in his ability also grew. Beverly expressed feeling that her husband had 'backed off' from her life yet convinced that he 'had a hand' in setting up her relationship with the new man in her life. She remarked that her relationship with her husband was changing, requiring a need on her part to work at understanding the relationship on her own.

*Themes Related to Objective Two: Beverly, Participant One*

Language of Participant: On-going bonds of reassurance give rise to diminishing closeness

Language of Researcher: Mutual attentiveness dwells with ebbing-enduring ties

Language of the Theory: Connecting-separating

*Descriptions Related to Objective Two: Kathy, Participant Two*

Although the family held a memorial service without a body, Kathy described only coming to terms with her dad's death after maintaining hope for ten years that he

could still be alive. Kathy described keeping in touch with her dad in dreams and maintaining a dream journal where she documented their many encounters. She described one dream in which she asked her dad if he were really dead and at the same time still with her. She described him saying, ‘that of course he was.’ Kathy portrayed this as a turning point and a way of accepting or coming to terms with her dad’s death yet knowing that he would continue to be omnipresent. She conveyed a maturing and deepening relationship with her dad that was ongoing. However, Kathy also spoke of how her dad continues to tease her as he did when she was a teenager, for example, running his finger down her spine.

*Themes Related to Objective Two: Kathy, Participant Two*

Language of the Participant: Deepening yet playful bonds give rise to acceptance of being apart and together

Language of the Researcher: Engaging-disengaging with whimsical ties

Language of the Theory: Connecting-separating

*Descriptions Related to Objective Two: Janet, Participant Three*

Janet spoke about her mom as a mother and a friend and how her relationship with her mother remains the same and continues to change. She described how she continues to speak with her mom over tea and how her mom as grandmother, continues to watch over her son. Although she described ‘loving her mother to bits’, Janet also described aspects of their past relationship as difficult. She recalled her mom as being judgmental and having ‘low self-esteem’. She further described how her mom would put a negative spin on her perspectives, often inciting an exchange of harsh words.

Discussions were frequently filled with innuendo and mixed messages from mom. Janet went on to speak about a closeness with her mom that has grown since her mom’s death.

She stated that her mother's way of relating with her has become more compassionate, less judgmental, and free of insinuation. She continues to ask her mom for guidance about her own parenting and other personal concerns. She enjoys the clarity of their communication and described how her mom is assertive and specific in her directions. Janet also described the support she feels from her mom as she makes decisions and choices in her life.

*Themes Related to Objective Two: Janet, Participant Three*

Language of the Participant: Compassion and tension fluctuate with changing bonds of love and guidance

Language of Researcher: Deepening devotion emerges amid ties of harmony-discord

Language of the Theory: Connecting-separating

*Descriptions Related to Objective Two: Helen, Participant Four*

Helen described that she and her son continue to enjoy a close relationship as they had before he died. She spoke about his three-year illness and how both she and her son worried about each other during that time. She pointed out how she advocated for her son, wanting to ensure that he died without pain. After he died, she recounted her on-going worry about his continued well-being and whether or not his death was pain-free. She spoke about how she missed him 'but didn't think he was thoroughly gone'. She said her concerns about her son have lessened 'little by little' and that she no longer worries about him. She described coming to feel her son around her on numerous occasions and spoke about seeking contact with her son through a medium, which she found comforting. She described these encounters with her son as 'a real pleasure' in her life. Helen stated that these encounters with her son have diminished over time, which she

believes to be indicative of her son being ‘more secure in the fact that [she is] all right’. She went on to say that these occurrences also offer her the comfort of knowing that her son is OK.

*Themes Related to Objective Two: Helen Participant Four*

Language of the Participant: Shared worry subsides with on-going bonds of growing contentment and relief

Language of the Researcher: Mutual concern wanes amid enduring ties of acquiescence

Language of the Theory: Connecting-separating

*Descriptions Related to Objective Two: Eileen Participant Five*

Eileen spoke about talking to her grandfather, knowing he has been able to hear her since his death. She stated that thinking about him is like waving hello, having him come to see her, and sharing memories and laughter. She described fond memories of special foods they shared, such as Dilly Bars and onion rings, which acted as triggers for her to talk to her grandfather. Eileen described a dream in which she saw and spoke with him in the garden, knowing that he could hear her, and knowing that he was looking after her and the family. Eileen spoke of the ways in which her grandfather assisted her when she asked him to help her find things or when she was experiencing challenges in her life. She often asked him to keep her safe while driving in busy traffic. She spoke about feeling her grandfather watching over and protecting her and alerting her to what was happening on the road. She went on to describe her relationship with her grandfather as being “basically the same” and “different as well”. Eileen spoke about being able to speak with her grandfather unencumbered by physical distance and that he continues to be there when she needs him. Unlike her grandmother who is still alive however, she

does not speak with him everyday. She described her grandfather as being ‘versatile’, able to do more things than he could before his death, such as being in ‘different places at different times’. Eileen expressed that she felt ‘a little bit guilty, questioning the fairness of him being ‘at [her] beck and call’. Although she considered this to be a ‘one-sided’ relationship, in which she initiated contact, she also believed that he didn’t mind and always felt his love and protection. She did wonder however, whether there were times when her grandfather came to her but she did not notice.

*Themes Related to Objective Two: Eileen, Participant Five*

Language of the Participant: The disquiet-serenity of constant yet changing bonds surface shared memories and expressions of lasting love and protection

Language of the researcher: Ease-unease of shifting ties shed light on perpetual devotion

Language of theory: Connecting-separating

*Descriptions Related to Objective Two: Doris Participant Six*

Doris spoke about how she and her mother developed a mutual understanding of each other after her mother died. Doris said that she developed empathy for the life her mother had led, having to raise Doris on her own, while her mother developed a new understanding of Doris as an individual and daughter. She described how her mother was now able to see her in a ‘different light’. Contrary to her views before death where her mother held a ‘black and white’ perspective on Doris’s life, her mother could now see ‘a lot of grey’ areas in Doris’s life that required ‘waffle room’ when it came to making decisions. As such, Doris felt that her mother had become more respectful of her decisions but continues to look out for her and guide her when making decisions. Doris went on to describe the tumultuous relationship she had with her mother during her

younger years in which her mother described her as a “follower”. However, Doris believed that her mother now understood that Doris was stronger than she previously thought. Doris also spoke of how her mother ‘put on a brave face’ before she died, hampering their ability to discuss important issues. Doris felt that the ability to have conversations and speak freely with her mother was enhanced within a softening of her mother’s personality after death.

*Themes Related to Objective Two: Doris, Participant Six*

Language of Participant: Changing bonds of friction and respect surface new found freedom and protection

Language of the Researchers: Derision-deference pulses with deepening ties and emerging liberty

Language of the Theory: Connecting-separating

*Descriptions Related to Objective Two: Mary Participant Seven*

Mary expressed that she came to value how an “energy relationship” with her son, in nonphysical form ‘can be just as rewarding’ as a physical relationship. Instead of using her eyes to see him, she uses her feelings, intuition, and ability to sense her son’s energy as well as the scent of his cologne. Mary described her relationship with her son as being similar to a parent whose child has moved to another city. Rather than contacting and communicating with him by telephone she communicates with her son in dreams. She stated that before going to bed at night, she sets an intention that her son will visit in her dreams. At these times, her son visits in various guises. He may be a baby, a boy of ten or twelve in his baseball uniform (a favorite time for her) or, a teenager. Mary described the joy she feels when holding him as a baby or hugging him as a boy or teenager. In other dreams, Mary spoke of how her son felt more like a friend than a child. At other times,

she felt like the child and he was a parent, teacher, guide, and mentor, imparting caring advice, and revealing aspects of her past and her future to her.

During dream visits, she described being playfully comforted by her son when she was distraught, as he would suddenly appear to her smiling, giggling, and confirming that, ‘of course’ he was alive. During their conversations in dreams, Mary said her son would talk about his life since dying and answer her questions about the night he was killed. Mary said that other conversations confirmed what they mutually had not disclosed before his death, that is, their knowing that he would not have a long life. Mary expressed that she no longer needed to look after or worry about her son. However, she felt that he worried and looked after her. Mary stated her son was supporting her as she worked through her depression, so that she keeps “moving forward” in her life and continues to look after her other son. Mary said that she intends to continue contacting her son as much as she can, while being considerate that he has other things to do in his life. Although Mary stated that she feels ‘lucky’ to have ‘a [mediumistic] gift or ability’, she does not see it as an easy road. She went on to describe the loneliness she feels, as many of her friends do not understand what she is doing. Mary remarked that although she had support from her family, she considered herself to be on the ‘outskirts of society’. She went on to say that her son was helping her to believe in her experiences with him and not to be discouraged by the opinions of others.

*Themes Related to Objective Two: Mary, Participant Seven*

Language of the Participant: Constant yet changing bonds bring confirmation amid joy-sorrow

Language of the Researcher: Affirming ties pulse with delight-despair

Language of the Theory: Connecting-separating

### *Common Themes Related to Study Objective Two*

Each of the Objective Two theme groups (participant, researcher, theory) for each of the participants was analyzed for interplay, in order to illuminate themes common among all seven participants. Common themes are expressed in the language of the participants, researcher, and theory of humanbecoming.

Common Theme in Language of Participants: Constant yet changing bonds come with turmoil and tranquility

Common Theme in Language of the Researcher: Enduring-shifting ties abide with ease unease

Common Theme in Language of the Theory: Connecting-separating

### *Participants' Voices*

The common themes for Objective Two relate directly to what the participants said in our recorded discussions. For example, Beverly, Participant One, said:

I think to begin with, I was worried about him finding his way. That he might be lost, so that was my initial response. ...And then ...as some weeks went by, I felt reassured. And then after maybe a couple of months had gone, by he would appear. ... My initial reaction would be 'Oh am I doing something wrong? ...My reaction would be, 'Is he trying to warn me of something?' ...I was a little bit uneasy ...I'd sort of panic...and start looking around at what I was doing. Gradually over time I realized ... I wasn't doing anything wrong. I remember going into the lawyer's office to sign the papers, ... after I signed the papers,...when I came out of the office,... he was there again. And I [had] a sense very much of comfort, ... its fine what you are doing ...it [her husband's presence] was supportive. So gradually, I let that [worry] go. ...The relationship is changing in a big way. So there is almost not a relationship, there still will be, but it's not going to be so immediate. ...Initially he was around quite a bit, the last year, I'd say less and less.

Kathy, Participant Two, said:

I would say to him [her father] over and over again 'Are you really gone? Are you still here and not in front of me? ... Ten years after [her father went missing while on a fishing trip] I had a dream [with her father] ... I asked [that] question that I'd had in every dream ... in the past ten years ... I said 'Are you really here? ... He

[her father] responded very earnestly 'Of course I'm really here' ...I guess that confirmed what I had been thinking for those ten years, which is that he's around in spirit so to speak, guiding me, often at troubled times in my life. ...A lot of times he acts as a guide or guardian ... sometimes I'll actually feel as I felt in the past something he used to do to me as a kid when I would be bending over, he'd take his finger and go 'zing' down my spine...some practical jokes,...the humor... I would say that [the relationship has] changed ... I haven't had those kind of interactive dreams in the same way [recently]. But he's still a guide in my life ...and things evolve to a deeper level ... more a part of you, in an omnipresent way...less of the immature relationship ...our relationship has matured. ... I went from a relationship with my father in life to a relationship with my father in death.

Janet, Participant Three, said:

I am an only child [and my mother] was a single parent, so it was pretty much me and her against the world. And now it's just me against the world, and she's like the invisible partner,... the support. ... Like you'd be wondering about something and you can hear her voice, but she's not there, giving you her two cents worth on what she thinks about that issue. ... It's like as if she's actually talking ... like you know [offering] help [on]... stuff that's bothering me, like my kids, my parenting skills. ... It was pretty nice to have that validation [from her mother] that I did something kind of scary, [referring to a decision she made] and did the right thing. ... She's more use to me dead [laughing] because she's [become] less judgmental. ... She's never mad anymore... We used to argue but she doesn't argue with me anymore. ... Her communication has become more compassionate, ... no innuendo. ... She could have a really negative outlook. ... It [referring to the negative outlook] could really get hard to take. Stuff that annoyed me doesn't get in the way anymore. I loved her to bits, but she's way easier to deal with now.

Helen, Participant Four, said:

When he first died, I was very upset and then little by little, I calmed down. ... I missed him, but I didn't really think he was thoroughly gone. ... It's a good relationship. ... You worry about each other. He was ill for three years before he died. So I worried about him. But I don't worry anymore. ... That's a real pleasure in my life, to know that he's OK. ... There's a peace about us that there wasn't before. ... I think our relationship is great.

Eileen, Participant Five, said:

I think [the relationship with her grandfather is] still basically the same. He's there when I need him, when I talk to him. ... I think it's different as well. Just in the fact I don't talk to him all the time, its not an everyday thing ... It's different in that he can do things now that he couldn't before [when he was alive], ... in that he's always there when I need him or when I want to talk to him. But it's

kind of odd that maybe I'm not noticing when he comes to me. Maybe I don't pay attention. ...I guess I feel a little bit guilty. ... if I go to talk to him and he's there at my beck and call, which I don't think is really fair, but I'm sure he doesn't mind. I see these little things like onion rings, and I'll think of him. I think of him more often than I would without those things, those things are triggers, things for me to remember those times with him. ... The relationship now ... I do feel that it's more one sided now. He does respond ... and that's fantastic, and I appreciate it, but I am the one doing the initiating as far as I know. ... I still feel him there and feel his love. ... Like [while] driving in a car ... I'll talk to him 'Help me to get there safe' ... it's the peace of mind that [he] is watching out for me ... it's very comforting ... that circle of protection.

Doris, Participant Six, said:

It's hard to put [the relationship with her mother] into words, I don't know, empathy might be the right word... I just sort of understand her life a little more. ... I think she kind of understands me a little better now. ... It's like she's all of a sudden got to know me more as a person, as opposed to me, as the daughter ... to see me in a different light. She could never understand me and now I think she does. She always labeled me as a follower; I think maybe she realizes that I'm a little bit stronger. That she might question some of my decisions or opinions but maybe realizes that they were the right thing for me. They may not have been right for her, but she respects [the decisions] nonetheless. ... [Now] I feel freer to say more because she's not at arm's length....She's softened up a little bit ...makes you feel you've always got someone on your shoulder looking out for you....She's not completely gone, there is a part of her here to keep an eye on us but the other part is where she needs to be.

Mary, Participant Seven, said:

I was really distraught when I went to bed. It was probably in the first year, maybe half a year [after her son died] ...in this dream ... he came in and I always say [in the dreams] 'Oh my God, you are alive!' and he will usually giggle and smile and say 'well of course I am'...I gave him a hug and we talked...I said to him...'I really miss you. Why did you have to go there? [referring to the night he died], And would you do this again if you had a second chance?' and he smiled and said 'Mom, I wouldn't have changed anything. That was the best night of my life. I had to go and I wouldn't change anything.' He gave me a hug and he left...It [the dream] was confirmation of something that we all knew in our family, and he knew, and I knew ...that he wouldn't be here for a long time ... I don't feel that he is dead. I just feel he's in a different place and that I will make contact as much as I can....It feels to me like when you children grow up and they move to a different city. You talk to your child on the phone. ...For me, it's the same thing with him. I feel like sometimes he's just in a different city and my contact would be through dreams. ...It's a continuing relationship but I've had to adapt to a different way in that relationship. He's not my child now, it's more like

I'm his child...and he's the mentor now or the parent... a friend more than a son [giving] caring advice [and] intense love... I don't have to worry about him... But I know he worries about me, and that's why at times he comes around because he wants to make sure I'm not too depressed...he needed to show me himself...To show me that this is real and you are experiencing what you think you're experiencing. And don't let anybody tell you you're not, because there's been a lot of people trying to discourage me.

Thus, the participants' words substantiate and make clear the themes associated with humanbecoming theory.

### *Findings Related to Study Objective Three*

In this research, Objective Three is: to describe personal hopes, concerns, possibilities of what might be in relation to keeping in touch. Each of the seven participants' interviews surfaced data relating to study Objective Three.

### *Descriptions Related to Objective Three: Beverly, Participant One*

Beverly stated she told her husband that she would be 'all right' so that he could 'go and do whatever [he needed] to do'. She expressed the need for each of them to 'move on'. Beverly anticipated she and her husband would meet again and that this meeting would be 'fun'. However, she felt she had more to learn and accomplish in this life without her husband's involvement. Beverly described her life since her husband's death as a journey of 'letting go', and of hoping to go on and live a strong, independent and productive life. She further described creating a new identity for herself, having a new relationship, and how she was becoming a more confident and stronger individual.

### *Themes Related to Objective Three: Beverly, Participant One*

Language of the Participant: Letting go and moving beyond with growing strength and confidence

Language of the Researcher: Fortitude intensifies liberating restraint

Language of the Theory: Transforming-powering

*Descriptions Related to Objective Three: Kathy, Participant Two*

Kathy described that after she came to accept her father's death, she gave him permission to move on, knowing that she would be able to take care of herself. However, she also wanted his continued guidance and protection when struggling with difficult decisions or issues, such as the guidance she had received from her father when she found herself in an abusive relationship as a young woman. Kathy felt he would still be a part of her life. Kathy said although her father had a grade eight education, he had "centuries beyond that in wisdom". She envisioned applying the deepening wisdom she received from her father in her life. Kathy described maintaining an ongoing appreciation of his sense of humor and recognized the importance of having more levity in day-to-day living. She expressed that she was working on not taking herself so seriously. Kathy spoke of not being afraid of death; she had learned through her father that death is not the end.

*Themes Related to Objective Three: Kathy, Participant Two*

Language of the Participant: Wisdom unfolds with growing levity

Language of the Researcher: Awareness emerges with mirth

Language of the Theory: Transforming

*Descriptions Related to Objective Three: Janet, Participant Three*

Janet expressed the hope that her mother would continue to provide 'emotional...spiritual, mental and physical' support for her and her children. However, Janet stated that when she asks for what she needs, she tries to do so in a non-specific way. Janet went on to say that she has found that life did not go well when she

specifically asked for what she needed. Janet expressed that her mother could take some time for herself within their relationship, because she and the children were ‘not so high maintenance anymore’. She felt that she and the children were more stable and doing better than they had in a long time. Janet talked about life after death as having freedom, because of not being confined by the body. She believed there would be ‘no pain’ and it would be ‘fun’.

*Themes Related to Objective Three: Janet, Participant Three*

Language of the Participant: Reciprocal progress stems from diminished needs and growing stability

Language of the Researcher: Mutual expansion arises amid unfettered solidity

Language of the Theory: Transforming

*Descriptions Related to Objective Three: Helen, Participant Four*

Helen said that she and her son have found mutual understanding and acceptance that he died before her. Helen described the happiness she experiences within the relationship she now shares with her son. She expressed her belief that both she and her son have found peace. She stated that she knows that she will meet her son again after death. Helen said that the close relationship that they shared will continue on when they meet again. She felt that her son will carry on learning because he had a curious mind. Helen expressed that her life has become relaxed, that things do not bother her so much.

*Themes Related to Objective Three: Helen, Participant Four*

Language of the Participant: Shared peace unfolds amid joyful anticipation

Language of the Researcher: Jubilant expectancy engenders serenity

Language of the Theory: Transforming

*Descriptions Related to Objective Three: Eileen, Participant Five*

Eileen confirmed that she felt her relationship with her grandfather would continue. She felt she was not holding him ‘earthbound’ by continuing her relationship with him, as other people believe. She remarked that he had completed his time and he is happy where he is. Eileen talked about developing her abilities further and eventually becoming a psychic. She hoped that her abilities would develop so that eventually she would be able to pass on messages from her grandfather to her grandmother. She felt that her grandfather could help her to develop her skills. Eileen expressed her intention of paying more attention to her grandfather when he comes to her. She talked about the possibility of having more open communication within the relationship so that it ‘becomes not quite so one sided’. Eileen described that open communication would provide the potential for her grandfather to come to her in a clear and definite way so that she could see and hear him fully and receive his message. Eileen expressed that even if she is not psychic, she spoke of the possibility of receiving visits from her grandfather when she has children. She went on to say that ‘kids are so incredibly psychic’ and therefore would have the potential for her grandfather to tell the children something to tell her.

*Themes Related to Objective Three: Eileen, Participant Five*

Language of the Participant: Desire for unfolding abilities surface amid doubt and the hope of enduring support

Language of the Researcher: Talents expand in light of aspirations and misgivings

Language of the Theory: Transforming

*Descriptions Related to Objective Three: Doris, Participant Six*

Doris confirmed that she felt her relationship with her mother would continue. She said she would like to receive more dreams and signs from her mother and be able to see her in a vision. Doris described that receiving more signs would give her more proof and confidence in explaining to her nine year old daughter that life goes on. She wanted her daughter to understand that even though others are ‘not physically [there] they are still around’ and the importance of not taking relationships with others for granted. Doris expressed her hope that her mother will continue to offer guidance and support so that she could be confident in knowing that she was making the right decisions. She went on to say that she would like to ask her mother’s opinion so that she could get a ‘clear and definite’ answer that she was ‘doing the right thing’.

*Themes Related to Objective Three: Doris, Participant Six*

Language of the Participant: Anticipated guidance and support give rise to strengthening confidence in personal decisions

Language of the Researcher: Expectancy engenders surety

Language of the Theory: Transforming

*Descriptions Related to Objective Three: Mary, Participant Seven*

Mary expressed that she looked forward to having a continuing relationship with her son. She described that during dream visits with her son, she wanted to follow him, no longer wanting to wake up. Mary described a ‘bittersweet’ feeling of being pleased that her son was ‘moving on’ without pain yet described her own pain of missing him as something she anticipated would last throughout her life. Although she acknowledged that her pain might get easier, she was sure it would never go away. Mary spoke of not fearing death, relishing the happy thought of being with her son again when it was her

time to die. She envisioned an easy death, picturing herself ‘skipping right down that tunnel’ and having her son answer her request to be the first one in line waiting for her. While longing to be with her son, she also acknowledged that her death would not be easy for those around her.

Mary conveyed that she had found her life path. She believed that her son would teach her how to develop her ability as a medium so that she could help other parents whose children had died. She stated that her goal was to help parents realize that they can continue to have a relationship with their children. Mary spoke of the group of parents with which she meets regularly. She expressed her belief that her son will act as a facilitator bringing children who have died to her as she works with their parents.

*Themes Related to Objective Three: Mary, Participant Seven*

Language of the Participant: Bittersweet acknowledgments unfold committed service

Language of the Researcher: Heartrending recognition engenders devoted expansion

Language of the Theory: Transforming

*Common Themes Related to Study Objective Three*

Each of Objective Three theme groups (participant, researcher, theory) for each of the participants was analyzed for interplay, in order to illuminate themes common among all seven participants. Common themes are expressed in the language of the participants, researcher, and theory of humanbecoming.

Common Theme in Language of the Participants: Unfolding strength and confidence

Common Theme in Language of the Researcher: Fortifying expansion

Common Theme in Language of the Theory: Transforming

### *Participants' Voices*

The common themes for Objective Three relate directly to what the participants said in our recorded discussions. For example, Beverly, Participant One, said:

I've gotten on with my life and created a new identity, and became stronger, and more confident in myself as an individual. I have said to him [referring to her husband] 'It's OK, I'm going to be alright. And you can go and do whatever it is you need to do. You can move on. I'm moving on and it's ok for you to move on'. ... My hopes would be to live an independent life, to have confidence and make good decisions ... to learn whatever it is I'm meant to. ... I want to come out of this grieving process transformed in a positive way. I'm absolutely confident that any time I really need him he'll be there. For example, my own death doesn't worry me at all. I don't feel frightened about death or dying. I just feel that he'll be there. ... It's about letting each other go, knowing that you'll probably see each other again.

Kathy, Participant Two, said:

It was hard for me to be ethical and do the right thing and ask him [her father] to move on. Or give him permission, I should say, to move on because he was my guardian, I didn't want to lose that ... it was as though he was still doing business here with us ... he's still here for me ... I learned a lot from him ... Well, [I hope] the relationship to continue, ... any potential wisdoms he might have to offer, guidance. ... The fun, that's important to have in life, levity. I wish I could learn more from him how not to take myself so seriously. ... That's something I know intellectually but I want to incorporate in my life more ... anything I can learn about death too. ... Death of the physical body is not the end of things.

Janet, Participant Three, said:

We don't have as much contact as we have had in the past ... I think that's because ... I'm more stable and the kids are doing really well. We're [referring to herself and her children] not so high maintenance anymore. ... So she [mother] can take some time for herself. But she's still around. ... I [hope for] whatever she can give us. I don't know what we could ask for. ... I always ask for what I need, I try to stay very nonspecific. ... I have found that when I am specific, life doesn't go so good. So when I go, '[Mom], just give me what I need' it all works good, ... emotional, spiritual, mental and physical support. ... [referring to death] there's so much freedom, you're not confined by this body, you have no pain, you know it's going to be a lot of fun.

Helen, Participant Four, said:

I accepted the fact that he was with me and my life didn't end. ... It's become a real acceptance which I didn't have before. He's gone and he's OK. ... I'm happy about it ... I think he's accepted the fact that I'm going to live a bit longer than he did. I think he's accepted his life and his death and he accepts my life and my death, there's a peace about us that there wasn't before. ... I think we will just meet again, the same relationship we had before, ... I don't think that will change in the afterlife, I think we will still be very close ... I do know that he's probably learning in some form or other because he had a curious mind. I have a very relaxed life right now and nothing is really bothering me that much.

Eileen, Participant Five, said:

I think [hope] that my relationship with my grandpa now might be that he would be able to help me develop those skills [referring to psychic skills]. ... I would like to think that there is a possibility for us to have a more open communication line so that our relationship becomes not so one sided ... so that he can come to me more clearly. Maybe not more often but clearer ... 'to see you fully or hear you fully. I get your message. I know that you're here in a more in a more definite way'. ... If I'm no more psychic than a doorknob, if I have a little one that all of a sudden turns to me and says grandpa says 'Hi', I think that's really a neat possibility.

Doris, Participant Six, said:

The possibilities are endless I guess. [referring to her mother's continuing support] ... Steering you down life's path, making the right choices ... knowing that you made the right decision. If you ask an opinion and if you get a clear and definite answer you know 'OK, I'm doing the right thing. ... More signs would be nice... it would prove to me that all this talking in the air hasn't been wasted. It would be nice for me to be able to tell my daughter 'Yes, this is true' ... I guess something for my daughter to see and then we can share that too.

Mary, Participant Seven, said:

Kind of bittersweet ...like it's nice that you [referring to her son] are moving on and you get to go to this nice after life. But also sad that I have to be in this position of missing him and going through pain for the rest of my life. ... That [the] pain might get a little easier but it's not going to go away. ... I think that he's going to be helping me with that process [of developing as a medium] and he's going to be bringing the kids ... I think he's going to be a facilitator helping me advance with this ability to help other people. ... I definitely long to be with him so that's what will make death easy for me. ... When it's my time, I'll be quite happy to go. ... I'll be skipping down that tunnel ... I've already put in my request that [her son] will be the first one in line waiting for me.

Thus the participants' words substantiate and make clear the themes associated with humanbecoming theory. As well, they illuminate the overarching findings.

### *Overarching Findings*

Analyzing-synthesizing all the descriptive paragraphs and themes at each level of abstraction, together, illuminated final statements of findings from the perspective of the participants, the researcher, and the humanbecoming theory. These final statements answer the research question: What is the meaning of persons' experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who have died. Each perspective reflects different meanings of 'keeping in touch'.

### *Participants*

For participants, the meaning of 'keeping in touch' is: treasured events and signs give rise to lasting comfort while constant yet changing bonds come with turmoil and tranquility amid unfolding strength and confidence.

### *Researcher*

From the perspective of the researcher, the meaning of 'keeping in touch' is: treasured events and signs give rise to lasting comfort while constant yet changing bonds come with turmoil and tranquility amid unfolding strength and confidence.

### *Theory*

From the perspective of the humanbecoming theory, the meaning of 'keeping in touch' is: valuing imaging in the connecting-separating of transforming.

### *Summary of Chapter Four*

In Chapter Four, study findings were presented. Seven study participants were introduced, and descriptions of keeping in touch synthesized from each interview were

presented. Themes in the language of the participants, the researcher, and the humanbecoming theory were illustrated and substantiated. A final process of analysis-synthesis described meanings of keeping in touch.

In Chapter Five, I will explicate the study findings, introduce relevant literature, offer recommendations within the discipline of nursing, and reflect on my own experiences of humanbecoming research.

## Chapter 5: Explicating the Findings

As I endeavor to conclude this thesis with a final chapter on the findings of this research, I reflect back on the quote of the first chapter “There’s no use, said Alice. One can’t believe impossible things...” (Carroll, 1865). Thus, I respect that the phenomenon of keeping in touch may continue to be questioned by others. However, I did not intend this research to convince or defend the experience of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died. The purpose of this study was to describe and explore the experience of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died. Specifically, the goals of this qualitative research study were to (1) contribute to knowledge development within the discipline of nursing regarding the phenomenon of keeping in touch with persons who have died; (2) to provide new understandings of this phenomenon that can inform nursing practice and nursing education based on the findings of this research that can shape nurses and students’ ways of being with people in practice; (3) inform policy development that support persons after the death of a loved one, and (4) to offer other areas for further research in relation to keeping in touch.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of this study which cast a light on a canvas on which I now begin to paint possibilities for practice, education, policy, and research in relation to keeping in touch with loved ones who have died. These possibilities emerge from the colors of an indivisible sense of being experienced by seven persons and their loved ones who have died. It is my hope that this painting will inspire others to consider and take up these possibilities for practice, education, policy and research. The colorful descriptions and explorations of the research participants have provided vibrant paint. I have endeavored to paint the descriptions and explorations of the

experience of keeping in touch using their paint, with brush strokes guided by the research framework of humanbecoming. This chapter is an invitation to stand back and take in the view of this painting so that it may speak to the heart and enflame inspiration.

Specifically this chapter will 1) discuss the findings related to the research objectives and theoretical themes in the language of the participant, researcher, and theory of humanbecoming (Parse, 1981, 1992, 1998, 2007) using relevant participant quotes to substantiate the findings, and introducing relevant literature; 2) discuss possibilities for the discipline of nursing with the focus on practice, education, policy, and research, and 3) reflect on my own experiences in this humanbecoming study.

#### *Discussing Study Findings Related to Theoretical Theme One*

Principle one of humanbecoming theory (Parse, 2007) addresses the theoretical theme of meaning, and as such underpins study objective one (i.e., what is the meaning of keeping in touch). The theoretical theme of meaning, principle one states: “Structuring meaning is the imaging and valuing of languaging” (Parse, 2007, p. 309). Meaning denotes the significance and interpretation a person chooses (Parse, 1998), from “illimitable options” (Parse, 2007, p. 309), to give to something. For example, during the interviews, each study participant described the meaning of keeping in touch with their loved one who had died, based on their chosen interpretation and the significance that these experiences held for them. All study participants described myriad feelings relating to the meaning of keeping in touch with their loved ones. Some of the feelings they described were: comfort, concern for the well being of their loved one, love, joy, peace, sadness, humor, security, healing, curiosity and ecstasy.

All participants experienced keeping in touch with the loved ones through specific events or signs. However, each person's description and the associated meanings were uniquely different. For the purpose of this study an event is a meaningful experience. The word sign or symbol will be used interchangeably, as both words were used by the participants. A sign or symbol is a meaningful interpretation significant to the participant. For example, Beverly interpreted her experience of hearing a bell ringing outside the house when there was no wind to move it, as being symbolic of the presence of her husband. She also described events such as dreams, smelling the scent of stale car freshener (a scent she associated with him at unusual times), seeing him in a room, and feeling his arms around her. Janet described an event when she was crying and asking for her mom; she felt her mom's presence as a sense of being cocooned as if wrapped in a warm blanket, bringing feelings of overflowing love. Kathy spoke about the joy and frustration she feels when she senses her father playing practical jokes on her, such as loosing and finding objects and the erasure of the recorded interview. Doris spoke about feeling a sense of comfort and security as she described hearing her mother's voice telling her to keep her "eyes on the road". She understood this to be a reminder to drive safely and a sign that her mother was watching over her. Several participants (Kathy, Doris, Eileen, Mary) experienced dreams in which they saw or spoke with their loved ones. During such dreams, they described conversing telepathically or hearing their voices.

#### *Explicating Common Themes: Valuing Imaging*

The common theme for study objective one, for all participants in their language, is *treasured events and signs give rise to lasting comfort*. Written in the language of the

researcher, the common theme for study objective one was *cherished ciphers and occurrences engender solace*. In the language of the theory, the common theme for study objective one is *Valuing imaging*.

The three concepts within theoretical principle one are imaging, valuing and languaging. Although all three concepts were perceived within the data, the theoretical concepts of valuing and imaging surfaced predominantly with theme one. The concepts of valuing and imaging are intertwined and woven within each participant's descriptions of experience of keeping in touch with their loved ones who have died. Valuing and imaging will be described below. Then both concepts will be discussed and illustrated with examples and quotes from the participant data.

*Valuing*. Valuing is the process of “confirming cherished beliefs” or attitudes (Parse, 1981, p. 45). The concept of valuing is “confirming-not confirming cherished beliefs in light of a personal worldview” (Parse, 1998, p. 38). The confirming of beliefs involves “choosing from imaged options and owning the choices” (Parse, 1981, p. 45). When cherished beliefs are chosen by an individual, “a matrix of principles and ideas” is formed that guide their life (Parse, 1998, p. 38).

*Imaging*. According to Parse (1981) the concept of imaging is “the cocreating of reality” which “structures the meaning of an experience” (p. 42). It is the “picturing or making real of events, ideas, and people” (Parse, 1987, p. 164). She describes the simultaneous nature of reflective-prereflective imaging whereby a person shapes their knowing and perception of being “explicitly and tacitly all at once”(Parse, 1981, p.43). Thus, Parse (1998) submits that explicit knowing is logically articulated and reflected upon critically. For example Kathy expressed that at times she questioned the scientific

explanation for the physical sensation she experienced with the presence of the father. Whereas tacit knowing is “prearticulate and acritical” (Parse, 1981, p. 43), “quiet”, “vague” and, “hidden from reflective awareness” (Parse, 1998, p. 36). For example, Kathy also described the knowing that her father was present at her wedding when she experienced the symbolic event of a mass of seagulls, swirling during the exchange of vows, only to move on when the vows were concluded.

*Participants’ valuing and imaging.* When Beverly described the meaning of keeping in touch with her husband who had died, her valuing or cherished beliefs and attitudes were expressed (imaged) as comfort and concern, related to herself and for the well being of her husband.

Comforting you know like and I’m talking within the first few days after he’d died, a bell outside my gate ringing that the wind can’t ring...Initially kind of comforting, but also a little bit disconcerting, concern for him, then it moved into this sense of smell...that’s really very clear, that I don’t question, very strong, it’s very clear. ...About six weeks after Bert died, we were sitting in Bert’s old car, the Lexus. It was a beautiful day and windy ...the windows were down and I was telling Ann that I sometimes experience Bert with this sense of smell. And she said ‘What does it smell like?’ And before I could answer her she said ‘Does he sort of smell like kind of one of those stale car fresheners?’ And I said ‘Yes, that’s it exactly’. She said ‘I smell him now’. And this car never had a car freshener in it ever. And I took a deep breath and I said ‘Yes, he’s here’ (pause) now he stayed with us all through our meal and we’ve got the wind blowing through the car... I think for me it was a comfort and an encouragement. I think it was his way of saying that he loved me...I just think, I don’t know to me, Bert has been supportive, the places and times that he would show up...Staying in touch with him, it just felt very supportive, all the way along... a couple of times I had dreams where he was sort of shaking his finger at me, but it was in a sort of a caring way, like watch out for this or look out. When he would show up, it just felt very supportive for what I was doing... (Beverly, 2008)

The quote from Beverly’s interview above, illustrates one participant’s example from the analysis-synthesis process of valuing imaging of signs and events. For Beverly, these were treasured signs and unpleasant events [that gave] rise to comfort and concern.

Participants Janet and Helen experienced keeping in touch with their loved ones through specific events, and signs that brought them love and joy. Janet described that when she was crying and asking for her mom, she felt her mom's presence through the experience of being cocooned, as if wrapped in a warm blanket bringing feelings of overflowing love. Janet also experienced the paradoxical discouraging-uplifting feelings associated with occurrences of keeping in touch with her mom. Helen spoke about experiencing her television lights flickering which brought her attention to her son's presence, knowing his interest in electrical ventures, this brought her laughter; she experienced delight in telling her son to leave her television alone.

Participants Kathy, Eileen, Doris and Mary all experienced keeping in touch with their loved ones through events, dreams, and signs that brought comfort and concern. Kathy spoke about the practical jokes her father played on her, such as losing her keys, only to find them in an unusual place after she told him endearingly to "cough it up please". At other times she has experienced the physical sensation of her father running his finger down her spine, in the way he used to tease her in her teens, a sensation she continues to experience as an adult. These practical jokes brought feelings of frustration yet enjoyment that her father continued to tease her as he did before he died. Doris, heard her mother's voice telling her to keep her "eyes on the road" as a reminder to drive safely, or rhythmic knocking in the same sequence as she heard as a child indicating her awareness that Doris was doing something she was not supposed to do. Doris described feelings of comfort and security that her mother was watching over her. She described the surprise and joy she experienced during such events that were signals of the presence of her mother. Mary described feelings of ecstasy, euphoria, intense love, humor, comfort,

curiosity, amazement, and healing she associated with her described experiences of seeing her son in full form in the room, smelling the scent of his Swiss Army cologne, feeling him touch her hand, his kiss on her cheek and hug her. At other times Mary described the comfort in receiving signs such a dragon fly flying into her house landing on the chair where she sat crying on the anniversary of her son's death. This was a significant sign to her as her son delighted in dragonflies. Mary also described numerous dreams in which she experienced visits from her son. During such dream visits spoke about the conversations she had with her son and feeling him hugging her.

It is interesting to note that none of the participants in this study expressed that their experiences of keeping in touch were frightening. For example, Doris stated, "they are my family, they are not going to hurt me ...nothing with them has ever frightened me".

*Valuing imaging dreams.* Kathy, Doris and Eileen, and Mary all experienced dreams in which they saw or spoke with their loved ones. Kathy, Eileen and Mary experienced dreams with their loved ones in which they spoke with their loved ones either by conversing telepathically or hearing their voice in a conversation.

*Valuing imaging senses.* All participants experienced keeping in touch with their loved ones through the physical senses such as seeing their loved one, hearing their voice, smelling a scent associated with them, feeling a kiss, touch or hug, and memories of eating special foods such as onion rings and Dilly bars. To some, these ways of keeping in touch might seem to be isolated events of paranormal phenomenon. However, to these participants, experiencing their loved ones through the physical senses were valued as cherished events in which they felt the presence of their loved ones which brought

feelings they described as comfort and concern, joy and comfort, peace and sadness, comfort and security, and comfort and ecstasy.

*Literature Relevant to Theoretical Theme One*

The common theme of principle one in the language of the theory is valuing imaging. Keeping in touch for all the participants brought a feeling of their loved ones presence after death. *Lingering presence* is a phenomenon that has been researched within the humanbecoming theory and identified as a universal lived health experience (Ortiz, 2003, p. 146). Presence is defined as “a person, spirit, etc. that is present” (Barber, 2001, p. 1144). Lingering means to “stay about” (Barber, 2001, p. 833). Parse (1998) experience lingering articulated lingering presence as “living the remembered is recalling a moment through a lingering presence that arises after an immediate engagement” (p. 73). Lingering presence can surface “moments, days, or years later” and such remembrances “can be startling surprises, calming, excursions, or uncomfortable intrusions” (Parse, 1994, p. 19). Persons can experience “presence with another” without boundaries (Parse, 1998) “at many dimensions within the universe” (Ortiz, 2003, p. 146). The sense of presence with an “apparently absent person” can occur in myriad ways such through “pictures, songs, stories, jewelry, ceremonial services, letters, and so on.” (Ortiz, p. 146). Ortiz conducted research using a hermeneutic method to explore lingering presence through “letters written by loved ones in remembrance of persons who died from AIDS” (p. 146).

I posit the findings of this study indicate that persons can presence in the moment through the physical senses with their loved one who has died. According to Parse (1998) lingering presence is a “reflective-prereflective abiding with attended to through glimpses

of the other person, idea, object, or situation” (p. 19). I posit that the findings of this study show that all seven of the participants experienced a lingering presence with their loved ones days, months and years after they died. For example Beverly described unquestionable presence of her husband in her experience of smelling the scent of stale car freshener, which lingered with her and her friend as she ate her meal in a car with the wind blowing through the windows. Beverly also experienced lingering presence as a memory, as she recalled the experience of her husband’s presence associated with the scent, and told her story during the research interview. Eileen experienced the precise scent she asked her grandfather to send her the day after his death. Mary spoke of the length of time the dragon fly remained on the chair as the family gathered around to appreciate it and the comfort that lingered on to sustain her through the rest of the day on the anniversary of his death.

I submit that all the participants in this study experienced keeping in touch as a lingering presence, when their loved ones, apparently absent in death, returned to be present with them through the physical senses in the moment of the experience, for notable lengths of time identified by the participants, and in the memories of these experiences. These experiences of keeping in touch resonated with the meaning of lingering the “abiding with” ... through glimpses of the other person... such glimpses know no boundaries” of life and death (Parse, 1994. p. 19). The participants’ descriptions of the feelings associated with keeping in touch also resonated with lingering presence in ways that were “startling surprises and calming excursions” (Parse, p. 19) as well as bringing comfort and concern.

The idea of “glimpses which know no boundaries” of life and death (Parse, 1994, p. 19) resonates with the philosophical concept of symbolism. Symbolism, as defined by Bullock & Trombley (2000), is a general literary term and technique creating connections between what is known and what is possible, to illuminate meanings. Symbols (recognized through the physical senses, language) are, in this school of thought, a medium for communication about, and interplay of, experiences and feelings. Symbols act to express people’s views of reality. For example, one development within symbolism was the “Swedenborg-type theory of ‘correspondences’”, which related to “connections within the visible, or between the visible and invisible, worlds” (p. 851). According to Bullock and Trombley, the aspiration of symbolism was “penetrating the veil beyond time” (p. 852). For those persons who kept in touch with their loved ones through the veil between life and death, the symbols received held significant meaning. The data for principle one surfaced many examples of signs received from the loved ones who have died. Such signs, received through the physical senses such as smelling a scent of cologne, seeing and feeling a dragonfly, hearing a bell ring and evoking the memories of foods shared with the loved ones.

Some of the participants in this study experienced dreams as symbols associated with their loved ones who had died. The participants described the meaning their dreams had for them as they kept in touch with their loved ones who had died. Kathy, Eileen, and Mary spoke of the comfort and reassurance they received from their dreams particularly when they were trying to come to terms with the death of their loved ones. They described their encounters with their loved ones in vivid detail and expressed how they

gained comfort and insight from their dreams. Dreams will be discussed further under theoretical theme two.

The participants in my study experienced keeping in touch with their loved ones in ways that were similar to research studies on after-death communication (ADC). For example, the participants in my study experienced keeping in touch in ways that were similar to the categories of “continued encounters” in a study by Daggett (2005), such as “visions and dreams”, “lost-things-found”, “symbolic messages”, and “sightings” which include scent of perfume (p. 198). Further, the findings from my study on keeping in touch were similar to the findings of a study by Klugman (2006) who conducted a random telephone survey of 202 male and female participants ranging in age from 18 to 87, of various educational backgrounds, ethnicity, and marital status. Klugman’s participants experienced post death contact with a loved one through the physical senses such as smelling scents associated with the loved one, hearing a voice, feeling a touch, and seeing an image of the loved one who died. Moreover, similar to a study on continuing bonds conducted with Chinese participants (Chan et al, 2005), the participants in this study experienced keeping in touch through the physical senses such as feeling, hearing, and seeing the loved one who died.

The similarity of the findings from the studies identified above (conducted with male and female participants ranging in age from 18 to 87, of various educational backgrounds, marital status, ethnicity, and cultures), underlined that the phenomenon of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died, through the physical senses is a universal lived experience (Parse, 1994). Benore and Park (2004) identified the need for clarification on continued attachment in ways that are identified as “proximal

manifestations of relating with the deceased” such as “direct communication”, as well as “distal manifestations of relating to the deceased” such as “linking objects” (p. 16). I submit that participants Kathy, Janet and Doris in this study have provided substantial data to support that they are keeping in touch with their loved ones who have died through direct communication such as hearing a voiced message. Participants Kathy, Janet, Doris and Mary experienced keeping in touch with their loved ones that linked objects to themselves or the loved one who had died in meaningful ways, such as lost keys and papers found in an unusual place or a recording of a daughter singing “Row, row, row, your boat” spontaneously starting to play when a participant was in the room, such music could only begin playing by switching it on manually. The participant stated that the recording of her daughter singing brought her mother great joy before her death.

#### *Discussing Study Findings Related to Theoretical Theme Two*

Principle two of humanbecoming theory (Parse, 2007) addresses the theoretical theme of rhythmicity, and as such underpins research objective two (i.e., to describe patterns of relating within the experience of keeping in touch). The theoretical theme of rhythmicity, principle two states: “Configuring rhythmical patterns of relating is the revealing-concealing and enabling-limiting of connecting-separating” (Parse, p. 309). The theme of rhythmicity relates to the paradoxical “rhythmical patterns of relating in cocreating reality” (Parse, p. 309). These rhythmic patterns are paradoxical in nature, rather than being opposites they are “dimensions of the same rhythm lived all-at-once” (Parse, 1998, p. 31). Parse (1998) describes a paradox as “one phenomenon with two dimensions” (p. 34). Within humanbecoming, a paradox is an “apparent opposite”.

However, rather than being a problem “that needs to be solved or eliminated”, a paradox is a natural rhythm that is lived in daily life (Parse, 1998, p. 34).

Paradoxical rhythmical patterns are embedded within all three principles of humanbecoming theory (1981, 1998, 2007). However, paradoxical rhythms will be highlighted in Objective two. For example, the study participants described their ongoing relationships as they kept in touch with their loved ones who had died. Paradoxical rhythmic patterns of relating surfaced within the participants’ descriptions of their relationships with their loves ones.

*Explicating Common Themes: Connecting-Separating*

The common theme for study objective two for all participants in their language, is *constant yet changing bonds come with turmoil and tranquility*. Written in the language of the researcher, the common theme for study objective two is *enduring-shifting ties abide with ease unease*. In the language of the theory, the common theme for study objective two is *connecting-separating*.

Within the theme of rhythmicity, three paradoxical rhythmic patterns of relating include revealing-concealing, enabling-limiting, and connecting-separating (Parse, 1981, 1998, 2007). These paradoxical rhythmic patterns will be explicated below.

*Revealing-concealing*. The concept of revealing-concealing is “disclosing-not disclosing all-at-once” (Parse, 1998, p. 43; Parse, 2007, p. 309). Imbedded within the concept of revealing-concealing is “the notion of the human as mystery-an appreciation of the unexplainable in human becoming’ (Parse, 1998, p. 43). Thus in disclosing-not disclosing “the message of the moment” there is mystery in that the “who that one is cannot be completely shown” (Parse, 1994, p. 18). Within the concept of revealing-

concealing Parse (1998) submits “[t]here is always more to a person than what the other experiences” in patterns of relating “there is always that which is all-at-once concealed” (p.44).

*Enabling-limiting.* Parse (1998) describes enabling-limiting as “living the opportunities-restrictions present in all choosings all-at-once” (p. 44). In every moment in the universe, persons have the “opportunity to choose” (Parse, 1998, p. 44). Within enabling-limiting there are opportunities and restrictions that are “all at once present in choosing one direction over another” (Parse, 1994, p. 18). By choosing one direction “there are both opportunities and restrictions” in what the person has chosen as well as “opportunities and restrictions in what is not chosen” (Parse, 1998, p. 44). Parse (1998) posits that the person “cannot be all possibilities at once, so, in choosing, one is both enabled and limited” (p. 44).

*Connecting-separating.* Connecting-separating is the “ebb and flow” of patterns of relating (Parse, 1994, p. 18). In connecting-separating persons are “with and apart from others, ideas, objects, and situations all-at-once” (Parse, 1998, p. 45). In each moment of connecting, “there is inherent separating and in each separating, inherent connecting” (Parse, 1994, p. 18).

*Participants’ connecting-separating.* The paradoxical pattern of connecting-separating surfaced predominantly within the participant descriptions of keeping in touch with their loved ones who had died. Inherently within the participant descriptions of their relationships with their loved ones, there was the notion that in “closeness, there is also a distance, and in distance, there is a closeness” (Parse, 1998, p. 45). For example, Beverly described how her relationship with her husband was diminishing overtime yet ever-

present. Thus, Beverly's relationship with her husband was paradoxical in nature, rather than being either diminishing or continuing, the relationship had dimensions of the same rhythm diminishing-continuing all-at-once. Beverly's relationship with her husband resonates predominantly with connecting-separating as she and her husband experienced "attending" with yet "distancing" from each other all-at-once (Parse, 2007, p. 309).

Beverly stated "the relationship is changing in a big way so there is almost not a relationship, there still will be but it's not going to be so immediate".

All the participants described the closeness they felt with their loved one even though they were apparently separated after death. In the language of the participants, relationships shared with loved ones who had died were: On-going bonds of reassurance give rise to diminishing closeness (Beverly); Deepening yet playful bonds give rise to acceptance of being apart and together (Kathy); Compassion and tension fluctuate with changing bonds of love and guidance (Janet); Shared worry subsides with on-going bonds of growing contentment and relief (Helen); The disquiet-serenity of constant yet changing bonds surface shared memories and expressions of lasting love and protection (Eileen); Changing bonds of friction and respect surface new found freedom and protection (Doris); and Constant yet changing bonds bring confirmation amid joy-sorrow (Mary).

The paradoxical "ebb and flow" (Parse, 1994, p. 18) of patterns of relating was inherent within all the participant descriptions of their bonds with their loved ones. Participant descriptions resonated with being "with and apart from" their loved ones (Parse, 1998, p. 45), experiencing a closeness while at the same time "a distance, and in distance, there is a closeness" (Parse, 1998, p. 45). For example, Janet, spoke about the

close yet difficult relationship she had with her mother before she died. Janet described that her mother put a negative spin on Janet's perspectives, which often incited a harsh exchange of words. She described the innuendo and mixed messages she received from her mom. This description of the relationship before death resonates with connecting-separating as Janet described the closeness yet distance at times she felt with her mother. After her mother's death, Janet spoke about how the closeness she has with her mom has become more compassionate, and free of insinuation. This description of the relationship after death resonates with connecting-separating as the closeness she shared with her mother before death has become even closer yet they are apparently separated after death. Helen described how she misses her son while at the same time she said she "didn't think he was thoroughly gone". She described that she continues to enjoy a close relationship with her son as they had before he died. Helen's descriptions resonated with connecting-separating as she described her sense of being with while being apart from son "all-at-once" (Parse, 1998, p. 45).

Participants Beverly, Helen, and Mary described feelings of concern or worry about their loved one and how their loved one was concerned or worried about them. These feelings of concern or worry changed within the relationship as they kept in touch with each other. Beverly spoke about her concern for how her husband was finding his way. She also believed that her husband was concerned about her. Gradually, in the relationship over time she felt more confident that he was able to find his way and she reassured him that she was well. At the same time Beverly felt reassured by her husband. Helen spoke of how she and her son worried about each other during his three year illness before he died. After her son died, she continued to worry about his continued well-being

and whether or not his death was pain free. However, Helen spoke of how gradually over time her worry lessened and she came to believe that her son was more secure that she was 'OK'. Mary spoke of how she no longer feels she needs to look after or worry about her son. However, she felt her son worries and looks after her. It is significant to note that Beverly, Helen and Mary expressed that their concern or worry for their loved one subsided as they kept in touch with their loved ones who had died.

*Connecting-separating dreams.* Five of the seven participants in this study described dreams in which they experienced seeing, or hearing the voice, and/or having conversations with their loved ones. These dreams held significant meaning within the relationships between the participants and their loved ones who had died. Kathy, Eileen, and Mary spoke of having conversations with their loved ones in dreams. These participants described the comfort, reassurance and insight they gained from their exchanges with their loved ones during dreams. For example, Mary described the comfort she received from conversations with her son in dreams whereby he answered her questions about circumstances around his death, described his life after he died, hugged her, and humorously played tricks on her. Mary expressed that she looked forward to her dream visits with her son. She consciously would set an intention to have a visit with her son before going to sleep at night.

Psychoanalysts such as Freud (1959) and Jung (1953) have interpreted the symbolic meaning of dreams. According to Freud (1959) dreams can be "governed by purely egoistic motives" (p. 302). According to Freudian theory, persons experience "ambivalence in love-relationships" (Freud, 1959, p.161). Thus persons can experience feelings of both love and hate within their attachments with others (Freud, 1959). A loved

one can exist for a person in the external world, as well as internally within the psyche. Dreams of a loved one following death can occur because the love-hate attachment is turned inward (personal communication, K. Evers-Fahey, Jan. 20, 2009). Thus, according to Freudian theory, dreams are motivated “according to the principal of wish-fulfillment”, as an attempt to satisfy the person’s need to maintain their connection to their loved one who has died (personal communication, K. Evers-Fahey, June 9, 2009).

On the other hand, Jung (1953) posited, “the vast majority of dreams are compensatory” (p. 104). Dreams, in providing a “mental corrective... always stress the other side in order to maintain the psychic equilibrium” (p. 104). Within Jungian theory of “individuation” (Jung, 1953, p.173), the person, in their becoming, seeks balance between their inner world and outer world. Jung theorizes that the inner world or unconscious has its own “realm of experience... [it] is a self-contained world, having its own reality” (1953, p.185). When a loved one dies they no longer exist in the outer world. Thus, according to Jungian psychology, dreams are compensatory. Dreams arise out of the person’s need to compensate for the absence of their loved one, who no longer exists in their outer world. In other words, according to Jung, loved ones who have died can exist as symbolic representations within dreams (personal communication, K. Evers-Fahey, June 9, 2009). The loved one, therefore, continues to exist after death in the inner dream world of the person. According to Jung, dreams give pictures, which are descriptions in “poetic metaphors” which provide a mental corrective (1953, p.104). Therefore dreams continue to contain the manifestations of the loved one who has died to maintain psychic equilibrium.

Some of the study participants, particularly those who were trying to come to terms with the death of their loved ones, described encounters with their loved ones in vivid detail and expressed how they gained comfort and insight from their dreams.

Encounters within dreams resonate with relatedness, “an essential element in the process of individuation: ‘without relatedness individuation is hardly possible. Relatedness begins with conversation ....’” (Evers-Fahey, 2004, p. 337). Therefore, the encounters study participants had in dreams facilitated how they sought balance between their inner and outer worlds, in coming to terms with the death of their loved one.

Jung submitted that the spirit which continues after the person dies is a “psychic fact”. (Jung, 1953, p. 185). He posited that after a person dies “the soul ... becomes a spirit which survives the dead” person and that such spirits exist as “manifestations” of the person’s unconscious mind. In Jung’s later work, he acknowledged the phenomenological perspective (Evers-Fahey, 2004). He proposed that reality is as the person experiences it. Therefore, according to Jungian psychology, if a person experienced their loved one after death, that experience was a reality for them. He submits that communications from the “Beyond” are the activities ...of the psyche” whereby the spirit can create an image in the person’s mind (p. 186). As such, “spirits are manifestations of the unconscious” (p.186). Thus, Jung’s (1953) conceptualization of the phenomenon of a spirit of a deceased loved one communicating through images received by persons resonates with the study participants of keeping in touch with their loved ones who have died.

*Shifting relationships.* The participants in this study described the ways in which their understandings of their relationships shifted as they kept in touch. Participants Janet,

and Doris described how they experienced more closeness with their mothers after they died. Janet, as explicated above, described how the closeness she has with her mom had become more compassionate, and free of insinuation after she died. Doris described the mutual understanding that had developed between her and her mother after her mother's death. Doris spoke of how she developed empathy for the life her mother led and that her mother developed an understanding of her as an individual and a daughter. Mary expressed that she came to value how an "energy relationship" with her son in nonphysical form, could be as rewarding as a "physical relationship" with her son.

#### *Literature Relevant to Theoretical Theme Two*

The theme of principle two in the language of the theory is connecting-separating. As reviewed in Chapter Two, there is an ongoing debate within the disciplines of medicine and psychology regarding the benefits of continuing or not continuing bonds with loved ones who have died. According to Simpson and McMahon (2005), there is an emerging trend in grief theory regarding "understanding and supporting the continuing bonds that exist" between persons and their loved ones who have died "rather than demanding the relinquishing of these bonds" (p. 128).

As discussed in Chapter Two, there is a paucity of qualitative research, particularly in the discipline of nursing, on continuing bonds following death. In 1993, Pilkington conducted a study with five mothers regarding their "lived experience of grieving the loss" of their babies (p.130), within the human becoming school of thought. In Pilkington's study, principle two in the language of the participants was "Consoling movements away from and together with the lost one and others" in the language of the researcher "Engaging-disengaging with the absent presence and others" and in the

language of the theory “Connecting –Separating” (Pilkington, 1993, p. 136). Of note, the findings of this study on persons’ experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who have died, although not focused on grieving, also identified connecting-separating as one of the theoretical findings. The concept of consoling in the study by Pilkington (1993) and the concept of comfort in this study were among some of the concepts in the language of the participants that described their experience of keeping in touch with their loved one who had died. In a study by Ketron (2008), in the discipline of social work, with adults whose mother or father died when the participants were between zero and seventeen years of age, the findings showed that recognition of the parent who had died, offered on an ongoing basis a meaningful feature or desired element within the participant’s lives. However, as it is recognized that the relationships between persons and their loved ones who have died are unique (Rothaupt & Becker, 2007), it may well be premature to fully compare these studies. More qualitative research is needed in nursing to explore the lived experiences of persons who keep in touch with their loved ones who have died.

In other nursing literature, the concept of triggers surfaces as associated with particular responses for those who have experienced the loss of a loved one. In this study the concept of a trigger is relative to what I have earlier called signs or symbols. For example, in the nursing theory of Chronic Sorrow (Eakes, Burke, & Hainsworth, 1998) the concept of triggers, “also referred to as milestones, are defined as those circumstances, situations, and conditions....that bring the negative disparity resulting from the loss experience clearly into focus or that exacerbate the experience of disparity” (p. 181). For those who are bereaved, it is the “presence of the absence that triggers the

sorrow” (Eakes et al., 1998, p. 182). Foster (2008), researching within the discipline of nursing, identified that “purposeful [chosen] triggers” to remember, or “nonpurposeful triggers” (p. 77), that reminded participants of their children who had died, were both comforting and discomfoting. Similarly, one participant in this study (Eileen) also used the term triggers in referring to the taste of Dilly bars and smell of onion rings that evoked fond memories about her grandfather. And, as the findings of this study show, contrasting feelings of turmoil and tranquility came with the various ways in which the participants kept in touch through the physical senses, as they maintained bonds with their loved ones. Further, it is interesting to note that within this study, as within the literature referenced, the physical senses integral to the act of keeping in touch (whether initiated by the person or the loved one who died), are themselves signs (interpreted by others as triggers).

#### *Discussing Study Findings Related to Theoretical Theme Three*

Principle three of humanbecoming theory (Parse, 2007) addresses the theoretical theme of cotranscendence and as such underpins study objective three (i.e., to describe personal hopes, concerns, possibilities of what might be, in relation to keeping in touch). The theoretical theme of cotranscendence, principle three states: “Cotranscending with possibles is the powering and originating of transforming” (Parse, 2007, p.309). Transcendence refers to a person’s “reaching beyond with possibles” (Parse, 1998, p.30). Possibles are “the hopes and dreams envisioned in multidimensional experiences” (p. 30). Possibles are options which surface for persons to choose with “inherent freedom” in their process of becoming (Parse, 1998; Parse, 2007, p. 309). Possibles arise within the “mystery of being human” (Parse, 2007, p. 309). Persons engaging in choosing, reach

beyond with possibles expanding their “horizons and bringing to light other possibles” (Parse, 1998, p. 30). Embedded with humanbecoming theory is the notion of “indivisible cocreation” (Parse, 2007, p. 308). Thus, principle three means that persons “cotranscend with possibles in cocreating reality illimitably” (Parse, 2007, p. 309). Therefore, cotranscendence is the process by which persons cocreate, cotranscend in “reaching beyond with possibles” (Parse, 1998, p. 30). Parse submits that the context of present situations exist from “prior choosings and [in turn] cocreate other possibles, and in this way, the human continuously invents ways of becoming while cotranscending with the possibles” (Parse 1998, p. 46). Cotranscending is the “changing of change” (Parse, 1998, p. 47). For example data for principle three, related to participant descriptions about how keeping in touch with their loved ones who had died shaped their hopes, dreams, and concerns, thus bringing to light the theme of cotranscendence.

*Explicating Common Themes: Transforming*

The common theme for study objective three, for all participants in their language, is *unfolding strength and confidence*. Written in the language of the researcher, the common theme for study objective three is: *fortifying expansion*. In the language of the theory, the common theme for study objective three is: *transforming*.

Three concepts within theoretical principle three are “powering”, “originating” and “transforming” (Parse, 2007, p. 309). The three concepts will be explicated below.

*Powering*. Powering is an endless “rhythmical process” manifesting a person’s “intentions and actions in moving toward possibilities” (Parse, 1981, p. 57). Three paradoxical rhythms of “being-nonbeing”, “affirming-not affirming”, and “pushing-resisting” are inherent within the concept of powering (Parse, 2007, p. 309). Being and

nonbeing are “in paradoxical apposition” with each other (Parse, 1998, p. 47). Nonbeing surfaces in day-to-day existence as persons, “all-at-once live what is with the unknown not-yet” (Parse, 1998, p. 47). Nonbeing is the mystery, that which is “not-yet known” and “potential risk of losing something of value” (Parse, 1998, p. 47). In becoming, persons live out rhythms of affirming or not affirming their being. Affirming-not affirming is the process of affirming ones’ self “in light of the possibility of non-being” (Parse, 1981, p. 57). Nonbeing not only relates to dying but risks of “being rejected, threatened, or not recognized in a manner consistent with expectations” (Parse, 1998, p. 47). Parse submits that the rhythm of pushing-resisting is inherent in “every human engagement” within the humanuniverse (Parse, 1998, p. 48). Tension is the struggle that comes “between pushing and resisting while engaging with others, issues, ideas, desires, hopes all-at-once in striving to reach new possibles” (Parse, 1998, p. 48).

*Originating.* The concept of originating refers to the way in which persons invent “new ways of conforming-not conforming” in the moments of “certainty-uncertainty” everyday life. Originating - the concept, is the creative ways in which persons choose to live their distinguishing uniqueness (Parse, 1981; Parse, 1998, p. 47).

*Transforming.* Inherent within the concept of transforming is the paradoxical rhythm of familiar-unfamiliar. In transforming, persons coparticipate in change in a deliberate way in “shifting the view of the familiar-unfamiliar” (Parse, 1998, p. 51). Opportunities for discovery surface in “the ongoing changes in human existence and the all-at-once changes in the world over time (Parse 1998, p. 51). Possibles rise up through the “process of struggling to integrate the unfamiliar with the familiar” (Parse, 1998, p. 51). Janet illustrated the concept of transforming in her description of keeping in touch

with her mother. She expressed her hope that her mother would continue to offer support for her and her children. However she spoke about being mindful of asking for what she needed in a non-specific way. In other words, Janet wanted to continue to do what was familiar to her (ask for her mother's support) yet she was deliberately willing to be open to the unfamiliar (ask for help in nonspecific ways).

All the participants spoke of their hopes, dreams and concerns in relation to principle three, which was objective three of this research study. As discussed above the main theme of principle three is cotranscendence. All the participants descriptions illustrated cotranscendence, their descriptions of how keeping in touch with their loved one shaped their hopes and dreams and concerns. The descriptions highlighted how each participant was "reaching beyond with the possibles" (Parse, 1998, p. 30), the options in their process of becoming (Parse, 1998; Parse, 2007).

*Participants' transforming.* All the participants' discussions focused more on their hopes and dreams than their concerns for themselves and/or their relationships with their loved ones who died. Moreover, the participant descriptions of their hopes and dreams resonated with the theme of transforming that is to say a shifting of their views of the "familiar-unfamiliar" (Parse, 1998, p. 51).

*Transforming hopes and dreams.* All participant descriptions of keeping in touch related to their hopes and dreams and these resonated with a shifting view of themselves personally and/or within their relationships with their loved ones. For Beverly, her hopes were focused on her own development as an individual and in her relationship with the new man in her life. She stated that she has more to learn and accomplish in her life. Although she knew her husband would be there for her if she needed him, she felt if she

continued to keep in touch it would “stifle” her development. On the other hand, for Helen, her hopes were in relation to keeping in touch with her son. She dreamed of seeing her son again. She expressed her belief that she and her son have mutually found peace. She said that the close relationship that she shared with her son will continue on when they meet again.

Kathy, Janet, Eileen, Doris, and Mary described their hopes and dreams about their ongoing relationship with their loved ones. Kathy, Janet, and Doris expressed their hopes regarding the qualities within their enduring relationships with their loved ones, as well as their personal development within their relationships. Kathy hoped that her relationship with her father would deepen as he continued to guide her and share his wisdom about life. She spoke of wanting to apply her father’s sense of levity and wisdom in her own life. She expressed her intention not to take herself so seriously in daily life. Janet described that she hoped that her mother would continue to provide support for her and her children. However, she acknowledged that there was a diminishing need for maintenance as she and her children were more stable and doing better than they had in a long time. Doris hoped that she would receive more signs from her mother within their ongoing relationship. She believed that her mother’s ongoing signs and guidance would give her confidence in decision making and explaining to her daughter about life after death. Kathy, Janet, and Doris described their hopes and dreams relating to qualities within their relationships and their personal development within their relationships. On the other hand, Eileen and Mary expressed their hopes and dreams for how their loved one would assist them in developing their psychic and mediumistic abilities within their ongoing relationships. Eileen, spoke of her dream of becoming a psychic. She felt that

her grandfather could assist her to develop her skills. She hoped eventually be able to pass on messages from her grandfather to her grandmother. Eileen said that even if she were not psychic, she spoke of the possibility that her children might be psychic and able to pass on messages from her grandfather. She also spoke of her intention to pay more attention to her grandfather when he comes to her. She hoped to have more open communication with her grandfather so that her relationship with him was not “quite so one sided”. Mary expressed her belief that her son will teach her how to develop as a medium as she endeavors to help other parents whose children have died.

All the participants in the interviews made references to their beliefs about life after death. Beverly, Helen, and Mary spoke of meeting there loved ones again after death. Kathy, Janet, Eileen, and Mary described what life after death would be like, or is like for their loved ones. Kathy and Mary expressed that they were not afraid of death.

#### *Literature Relevant to Theoretical Theme Three*

As stated above, the participants described their hopes, dreams, and concerns related to the theme of cotranscendence within principle three. Rothaupt and Becker (2007), in their review of the literature, identified that authors are theorizing how bereavement can facilitate the growth and development of individuals. Rothaupt and Becker (2007) submit that these authors are bringing the possibility into view that “bereavement as a catalyst for growth and personal development necessitated a paradigm shift in the field” of research (p. 9). This shift in conceptualizing bereavement was in contrast to the previous dominant paradigm, which viewed bereavement primarily as pathology (Rothaupt and Becker, 2007). The findings from this study have shown that all seven participants have experienced cotranscendence through their experiences of

keeping in touch with their loved ones who have died. These findings resonate with the current paradigm of viewing bereavement as a possibility for growth and development in persons. For example, Mary expressed that her son would assist her to develop the skills to help other parents whose children have died. Kathy expressed that her relationship with her father would guide her in integrating a desirable sense of levity and wisdom in her own life. This is further illuminated through the common theme in language of the participants, relative to study objective three: unfolding strength and confidence. Thus, the study data illuminated how participant experiences of keeping in touch have enabled the “reaching beyond with possibles” (Parse, 1998, p. 30) in the process of becoming.

The notion of cotranscendence with “possibles in cocreating reality illimitably” (Parse, 2007, p. 309) is underlined by Malinski (2006) in her description of energy. She posits that

[e]nergy transforms; it does not cease to exist. ...If, indeed, the human energy field transforms with dying, then the only thing lost is the manifestation of the physical body. The energy patterning persists, manifesting in new ways. For those grieving the loss of a loved one, then, grief work involves coming into a new and qualitatively different relationship with the loved one, rather than having to let go and move on. (p. 298)

Malinski (2007) highlights the limitless unfolding possibilities when persons keep in touch with their loved ones after death and her propositions are reflected in the descriptions articulated by the participants in this research.

As discussed above, the study findings resonated with the theme of transforming that is to say the “shifting the view of the familiar-unfamiliar” (Parse, 1998, p. 51). The findings of this study resonate with the results of a qualitative research study conducted by Ashton (2007) of mothers who experienced continuing bonds with their children after death. The results of the study revealed that the participants experienced “significant

changes in self and attitudes, such as a new enthusiasm for living ...strength, confidence and a new sense of enrichment, joy and pleasure ... alongside the continuing pain of loss and an ongoing relationship with the child” (Ashton, 2007, p.7). Both the findings of this study as well as Ashton’s study resonate with the theme of transforming, specifically, an unfolding strength and a shift in their view of themselves. However, the findings of a mixed methods study, conducted by Foster on the experience of maintaining continuing bonds with loved ones after death, revealed contrasting results in relation to the theme of transforming. While the study showed correlations “between continuing bonds and personal growth, as well as grief distress” in bereaved child participants, in contrast, the findings for bereaved adult participants revealed that continuing bonds did not correlate with personal growth or grief distress (Foster, 2008, p.89).

The seven participants in this study cocreated their belief of being with their loved ones who have died, in ways that manifested cotranscendence in their endless processes of becoming. The postulate of illimitability within the humanbecoming school of thought (Parse, 2007) suggests that possibilities for practice, education, policy and research are limitless. Some possibilities that have surfaced from this research study are offered below.

#### *Possibilities for the Discipline of Nursing*

Interpretation and discussion of study findings yield unfolding knowledge within the discipline of nursing and as such, offer to expand the nursing science base.

Specifically, the findings in this study expand knowledge regarding the phenomenon of after-death communication, conceptualized in this study as keeping in touch. In other words, while there have been studies in nursing and other disciplines on after-death

communication, a review of the literature has not revealed research regarding the meanings of ongoing communication (i.e., communication taking place over time) between persons and their loved ones. As a contribution to the nursing science base, this study is situated in the theoretical framework of humanbecoming. In relation to exploring disciplinary knowledge this is significant, as the purpose of the analysis-synthesis process within humanbecoming research is ultimately to contribute to the science of the discipline of nursing. Further, the findings of this research are unique. There has not been a descriptive exploratory study within the humanbecoming theoretical framework regarding ongoing after-death communication between persons and their loved ones who have died.

According to Parse (2001), study findings are interpreted in “light of the original conceptualization and requires connecting the identified themes to the discipline- specific frame of reference” (p. 59). The purpose of the analysis-synthesis process is to move the language of the descriptive statements “up levels of abstraction to the level of science in the discipline” (Parse, 2001, p. 59). Thus, a heuristic interpretation is the process of weaving the data of the lived experience of the participants into the “theory and propels it beyond to posit ideas” for research and practice endeavors (Parse, 1987, p. 177). In other words, new knowledge surfacing from the findings of this study provides nurses the opportunity to reflect and choose to practice in ways that can be guided by the theory of humanbecoming.

I posit that the new knowledge provided by the findings of this study offers nurses opportunities to reflect upon how the participant experiences of keeping in touch could potentially shape their practice in new ways. Further, I submit that if nurses, educators,

researchers, and policy makers choose to reflect upon the findings of this study, there is the potential to cocreate possibilities for practice, education, research and policy. Such possibilities could have significant impact on the quality of care for persons who wonder about, or keep in touch with their loved ones who have died as well as the care of persons who have died. Rather than articulating the discussions of the findings as recommendations or suggestions, which may imply my point of view without the consideration of other points of view, drawing on the notion of cocreation (congruent to the humanbecoming theory), I discuss the findings as *opportunities* for nursing consideration regarding practice education, policy and research.

#### *Considerations for Practice and Education*

This research offers possible considerations for nurses and nursing students in relation to practice as well as education. It is my hope that this thesis generates considerations that may serve to shape practice, serve persons who keep in touch with their loved ones who have died, and ultimately serve the persons who have died.

*Considering persons may believe that loved ones continue to exist after death.* The findings in this study illuminate that participants continued to experience the presence of their loved ones after death. As such, these findings offer opportunities for nurses and nursing students to consider that persons may feel that their loved one continues to exist after death and to consider that the grieving process may not occur in a predetermined, linear, finite way. For example, Mary stated that she did not consider her son to be dead. Kathy described that her father was “very much a part of [her] life”. Malinski (2006) discussed her own experience after her husband died, and in doing so, underscored a meaningful consideration for nurses and nursing students as they engage with persons who

keep in touch. She stated, “grief work involves coming into a new and qualitatively different relationship with the loved one, rather than having to let go and move on ... as so many people encouraged” (p. 296). All participants in this study expressed their belief that they would either see their loved one again after they died or would continue to have an ongoing relationship with their loved one.

*Considering assumptions and attitudes.* The findings from this study offer opportunities for nurses and nursing students to explore how their assumptions about and attitudes, toward persons who keep in touch with loved ones who have died, shape how they engage with persons who disclose this experience to them. Participants in this study spoke about how persons who disclose their experiences of keeping in touch may fear being judged, disrespected, or assessed as mentally ill. For example, Janet and Mary described the potential for others to question the rationality of keeping in touch. Mary spoke about the reticence she felt in disclosing her experiences of keeping in touch with her son. She expressed the possibility that persons who experience ongoing relationships with their loved ones, might be considered by others as mentally ill and in need of institutionalization.

...there's a fine line between psychic and psychotic in most people's minds and even in my mind. I know that there could, because if you let yourself grieve too far one way and only know that the only thing that you're living for is a spirit contact and for seeing your son, then you could almost say that you're obviously having a mental condition. So finding the balance is really important, just like it is in everything in life... I can't talk to people about [keeping in touch with her son] that's the difference. I can't just go out there and say I saw my son today or my son's doing fine... and things like that, they'd think I was ready for a mental institution”. (Research participant, Mary, 2008)

Kathy and Janet spoke of their perceptions of how science or scientific thinking might interpret their experiences. Kathy stated she herself questioned the possible

scientific explanation for the physical sensation she experienced down her spine associated with her father. However, both Kathy and Janet expressed they knew that their experiences were real to them. From a different perspective, Eileen expressed that she understood why she was asked during the interview if she had concerns about keeping in touch with her grandfather because some people might consider that an ongoing relationship with her grandfather would keep him “earthbound”. Doris stated that she was not frightened or concerned about keeping in touch and the possibility of future encounters with her deceased loved ones.

*Considering persons may need to be heard and supported.* The findings from this study illuminate how nurses and nursing students might choose to be with persons who experience ongoing relationships with their loved ones who have died in ways that honor people so that they feel heard and supported. Eileen described the surprise and comfort she experienced when she received the first contact of her grandfather the day after his death. Her grandfather responded quickly to her request for a sign, she stated that the scent she received from her grandfather was the exact scent that she specifically requested. Kathy has maintained a relationship with her father through her experiences of keeping in touch for 28 years. All the participants in this study expressed their belief that they would either see their loved ones again after they died or would continue to have an ongoing relationship with their loved one. Although the participants described the relationships they had with their loved ones who died as being different than a physical relationship they were uniquely meaningful. For example, Mary expressed that she came to value how an “energy relationship” can be as rewarding as a “physical

relationship” with her son. Beverly stated “its normal, its part of life...” underlining that for her, this experience was part of her life.

*Considering persons may need to be asked about their experiences.* Findings from this study offer the potential opportunity for nurses and nursing students to consider that persons may find it a relief to be asked about their experiences of keeping in touch with loved ones. For example Mary stated persons who experience keeping in touch may feel that need to hide their experience from others. One possibility might be to ask the question “Do you feel that your loved one is around you?” This might indicate openness on the part of the nurse that this experience exists. Asking such questions may open a door for a person to disclose their experiences of keeping in touch. Once a person discloses their experience of keeping in touch, there is an opportunity to listen respectfully and compassionately to their descriptions of their experiences. Indeed, Ketron (2008), Rothaupt & Becker (2007), and Winokuer (2004) acknowledge the importance of listening, exploring meaning, and the ways in which such meanings can be a source of comfort and support for persons who experience keeping in touch with their loved ones who died. Moreover, I submit that when nurses explore such meanings with persons, other possibilities of exploration may also present themselves such as how experiences of keeping in touch influence the person’s health and daily life.

*Considering the significance of listening.* The findings from this study offer nurses and nursing students opportunities to consider how listening to the memories, dreams, and stories of keeping in touch after death, can be consoling for persons as they talk, laugh, and cry about their loved ones who have died. For example, Kathy, Helen, and Mary described the recognizable personality traits of their loved one that continued

after death. Kathy and Mary described their loved ones practical jokes. Helen described her son's ongoing sense of humor. Expressions of joy and sorrow were woven throughout the stories of the research participants as they recounted their experiences of keeping in touch. Kathy expressed the need to talk about memories of her father; she expressed how the dreams she had with her father (whose body was never found after a fishing accident) facilitated her coming to realize that he was not coming back. The literature acknowledges the importance of listening, exploring meaning, and the ways in which such meanings can be a source of comfort and support for persons who experience keeping in touch with their loved ones who have died (Ketron, 2008; Rothaupt & Becker, 2007; Winokuer, 2004).

*Considering the needs of families and friends.* I submit that it would be beneficial for nurses and nursing students to reflect on how to offer support for and engage in teaching and learning with families and friends of persons who keep in touch with their loved ones who have died. Rothaupt and Becker's (2007) review of the literature revealed that family and friends can be slow to offer support to the bereaved and even if support is offered, rarely is it continued on an ongoing basis. They suggest that education for family and friends who are interested in providing support can be helpful (Rothaupt & Becker, 2007). Mary described feelings of being alone, isolated, and the need to keep her experiences hidden because of the attitudes of others. Mary discussed how keeping in touch with her son has affected her family. "I'm comfortable talking to my family about it, although as time goes on they feel that sometimes I dwell on it a little too much. They have to still live in this world, they need to be connected to the human side of things."

*Considering that persons' experiences may be changing.* The findings from this study invite nurses and nursing students to be mindful that persons experience ongoing relationships with their loved ones who have died in myriad ways that are ever changing. The study findings revealed how the participants described the meaning of their ongoing relationships with loved ones who died. These descriptions were unique, paradoxical and ever changing. Mary and Kathy spoke of the changing ways of being within their relationships with their loved ones who had died. Mary spoke of how her son had become more like a friend and mentor to her. Kathy expressed that her father had become more like a guide.

*Considering the significance of words.* Findings from this study illuminate the significance of the words nurses and nursing students choose when exploring the meaning of keeping in touch with persons who maintain an ongoing relationship with a loved one who has died. For example, Mary described how commonly used words such as "closure" and "moving on" were irritating to her. According to Simpson and McMahon (2005) as well as Friedman (2001), mindfulness of ways of being as well as the language used when engaging with persons whose loved ones have died is important. For Mary, such words as "closure" and "moving on" imply the expectation and pressure to grieve in a particular way. Friedman (2001) posits that words such as "closure" when used by health care professions can give the effect of "setting a time limit on grief for those who have lost people they loved" (p. 9).

As discussed in Chapter two, Howarth (2000) has critiqued the ways in which dominant discourses within medicine and science in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have created boundaries between life and death. Earlier in my research process, prior to the analysis-

synthesis process I posited that the common phrase, keeping in touch, could be introduced as a new discourse when talking about bereavement. The phrase keeping in touch would contribute to new language that could be used to create bridges between persons whose loved ones have died and professionals, so that persons might feel more secure to disclose the experiences they have with their loved ones who have died. At this stage of the research process, after analysis-synthesis of the data, I submit that the concept of keeping in touch would facilitate inquiry into the experience of communication between persons and their loved ones who have died. It provides a discourse that facilitates the notion of the possibility of ongoing relationships with persons who have died rather than words such as “moving on” and “closure”.

*Considering persons' need for respect and compassion.* The findings of this study, as well as other research underscore the importance of respect and compassion for persons who experience keeping in touch. Ketron (2008) interviewed twelve adult participants who experienced the death of a mother or father when the participants were between zero and seventeen years of age. One significant theme from the interviews was “that other people imposing their conception of how the grieving process ought to unfold was unhelpful” (p. 85). Ketron (2008) stated that the quote “death ends a life not a relationship” was a strong foundation for the exploration of the nature of the relationship the participants had with their parent who had died (p. 85). Rothaupt and Becker's (2007) comprehensive literature review cited numerous research studies that support the paradigm shift from the pathology associated with bereavement to the view that bereavement offered opportunities for personal growth. Moreover, Rothaupt and Becker (2007) identified that the literature review uncovered a biased view that women's

grieving has been associated with pathology. The findings of this study, as well as the research identified above, underscore the importance of respect and compassion for persons who experience keeping in touch with loved ones who have died.

*Considering unique ways of acknowledging a loved one's death.* The study findings provide opportunities for nurses and nursing students to consider the unique ways that persons may acknowledge their loved one after death. For example, Janet described that she had her own way of acknowledging the death of a loved one; she did not attend funerals. She expressed that although she experienced sadness that the loved one had died, she was happy because of her beliefs in life after death. Kathy described that she and her mother had different views on how to acknowledge death. Her mother did not want a funeral. Kathy chose to acknowledge her mother's death in an informal way at the beach. Kathy's personal views opens the possibility for nurses and nursing students to consider that there may be formal and informal ways in which persons wish to acknowledge the death of a loved one. Furthermore, it offers the consideration that persons may experience feelings other than sadness after death.

*Considering benefits for families and friends.* The participant data in this research study have the potential to provide opportunities for nurses and nursing students to consider that family and friends might benefit from hearing about a person's experiences of keeping in touch. Beverly, Kathy, and Eileen expressed that their experience of keeping in touch had benefits to their family and friends. Beverly stated that after she shared her experience of keeping in touch with her husband, her friend then had an experience that was meaningful to her.

I was telling Ann that I sometimes experience Bert with this sense of smell and she said "What does it smell like?" and before I could answer her she said "Does

he sort of smell like kind of one of those stale car fresheners?” and I said “Yes, that’s it exactly”. She said “I smell him now” and this car never had a car freshener in it ever. I took a deep breath and I said “Yes, he’s here”. Now he stayed with us all through our meal [they were eating take out hamburgers] and we’ve got the wind blowing through the car. And we drove back to my house. She got into her car to drive home, and then when she got home she phoned me. And she said “Bert stayed with me. He came with me in my car. He stayed with me until I got to the door and then when I stepped into my house” she said “He was gone” and she said “He used to do that often” when he used to pick her up, when we had dinners here, family dinners. And she said “He would always get out of the car and walk me to the door”. So somebody else experienced it as well (Beverly, 2008).

Kathy stated that her husband enjoyed the practical jokes her father played on her. She went on to say that her friends appreciated and benefited from the memories she shared about her father. Eileen stated that she felt that her family found comfort from her account of her experiences of keeping in touch with her grandfather the day after he died. She stated she looks forward to being able to share her ongoing experiences of keeping in touch with her family.

*Considering significance of dates of events and anniversaries of death.* The findings of this study offer considerations for nurses and nursing students as to the continued meaning that dates may have for persons who keep in touch with their loved one following death. During interviews and in the analysis-synthesis process, I noted the significance that dates of events and anniversaries of deaths had for the study participants. Kathy continued to remember the anniversary date of her father’s death after 28 years. Mary was able to recall the events associated with a particular anniversary of her son’s death.

*Considering persons beliefs about spirituality.* The study findings provide opportunities for nurses and nursing student to consider the unique personal views of spirituality relating to persons’ experiences of keeping in touch with loved ones who have

died. Beverly, Kathy, and Eileen spoke of how their experiences of keeping in touch were related to their exploration of or belief in their own view of spirituality. Consideration of other persons' views of spirituality may provide opportunities for nurses to explore how their personal beliefs might support or restrain their ability to be respectful and compassionate towards other person's spiritual beliefs.

#### *Other Considerations*

In addition to the possibilities for practice and education as discussed above, I submit that nurses, nursing students, educators and administrators have the opportunity to discuss the findings and implications of this study with nursing colleagues as well as the general public regarding the experience of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died.

#### *Possibilities for Policy*

As stated in Chapter Three, the findings from a descriptive exploratory research methodology cannot be generalized. Moreover, within the humanbecoming school of thought, the postulate of illimitability advances the notion of "indivisible unbounded knowing [that extends] to infinity" (Parse, 2007, p. 308). Such ideas call for deep reflection regarding the possibility of applying the findings of this research to conventional policy development that is open to generalizability and bound by finite time.

As I envision ending this thesis, I recall some thought provoking scenes from a documentary film. This documentary film features the principal actor (myself) playing the role of a graduate student who enters a class titled "Policy Context of Practice". The film documents the student's critical analysis of policy within the practice of nursing. The scenes highlight the illuminating discussions in class with the professor and her colleagues. Such discussions underline the complexities in developing, implementing and interpreting policy for practice and the impact such processes have for nurses and persons within healthcare. The film ends with the graduate student expressing awe and respect for how language used in policy can shape the practice of nurses and the health care of persons. Now that I am about to

write on the possibilities of the research findings for policy, again I experience feelings of awe and respect for the participants in this study and their loved ones who have died. Where shall I begin? How do I find the words? Ah ... as I review my notes and reflections from that course I had a revelation based on the work of Cheek and Gibson (1997) and Wharf and McKenzie (2004). (Personal journal entry, 2008)

*Policy.* Policy is defined as “a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government, party, business, or individual, etc.” (Barber, 2001, p. 1122). Cheek and Gibson (1997) assert that the development of policy can have a powerful influence, which is often underestimated. Government, healthcare, and hospital policies have the capacity to shape the healthcare system, practice and the persons they serve. Specifically, policy can influence how nurses choose to practice and the quality of care received by the persons they serve.

The notion of developing policy to generalize and standardize practice and health care is challenging. Indeed it is incongruent to apply the humanbecoming school of thought to develop policy for the purpose of standardization, in light of the postulate of illimitability which “expresses indivisible, unpredictable, ever changing” aspects of the humanuniverse within this paradigm (Parse, 2007, p. 308). Moreover, it is recognized that to attempt to structure language in the form of a policy in a fixed formalized way for all persons with the intent to guide practice is incongruent with the principle of structuring meaning through languaging (Parse, 2007). Structuring meaning through languaging is “inherently paradoxical” (Pilkington & Jonas-Simpson, 1996, p. 19). Languaging is not fixed and therefore the use of language to guide practice in the form of a policy cannot be fixed.

*Principle as policy.* Wharf and Mackenzie (2004) cite Gil’s perception of social policy as “guiding principles for ways of life, motivated by basic and perceived human

needs” (Gil, 1990, p. 23). Therefore, I suggest that within the paradigm of humanbecoming, it is possible to cocreate guiding principles with persons who keep in touch with loved ones who have died. Wharf and MacKenzie state that policy is “about choosing directions” when choices are clouded by conflicting values and where facts and information cannot be marshaled to establish clearly that one choice is superior to all others” (2004, p. 2). Such choices are made at the government, community and individual levels. Therefore with the intention of addressing the possibilities for policy in relation to the findings from this research study in a way that is congruent with humanbecoming, I make the following proposal. I suggest the notion of cocreating guiding principles rather setting fixed policies. I propose that the findings from this research study could influence the cocreation of guiding principles. I posit that policy makers, administrators, healthcare providers such as nurses and persons who *keep in touch* with their loved ones after death, could engage in focus groups for the purpose of cocreating guiding principles. One way of facilitating the cocreation of principles could be through the exploration of questions within such focus groups.

### *Cocreating Guiding Principles*

In the following pages I will identify possible questions that could be explored in focus groups for the purpose of cocreating guiding principles. First, I will illustrate several practice scenes. Then I will identify questions that could be used within focus groups.

As I reflect on the experiences I have had as a daughter, nurse, educator, and the stories I have been privy to by family members, nurses, students and the findings from this and other research studies, it is evident to me that persons continue to exist after

death. Several scenes come to mind that I have personally witnessed, experienced or had described to me by others. I shall describe the following scenes as one might read in a television or film script; however these scenes were actual events.

*Scene one.* Nurse enters room of male patient in his thirties who died in an unsuccessful code five minutes ago. This man had no relatives to notify of his death. The man is naked with a sheet covering his body, a chart is lying on his lower legs, and his lifeless feet are exposed. A doctor and intern are standing over his body discussing medical information.

*Scene two.* A student nurse talks with her instructor. She describes her feelings of confusion during her experience of assisting the nurses in washing the body of a person who had died. She recounts how her way of being with the person who she believed was still in the room differed from the approach of the nurses.

*Scene three.* A parent in her eighties is sobbing in a support group. She recounts the painful story of how she was not given the opportunity by police over fifty years ago to view the body of her deceased son who had died in a car accident. They had sat at the site for one hour before being told to go home.

*Scene four.* Nurses are seated in the break room. They discuss their frustration over a patient who is dying in the hall way because there is no available bed in the hospital.

*Scene five.* A family is seated around their deceased father. The nurse has just left tea for them. They discuss how grateful they are that they have the opportunity to be together as a family and have time with their husband, father, grandpa. They talk and joke knowing that their loved one who has died is still with them.

### *Questioning to Facilitate Cocreation of Guiding Principles*

Based on the above real life scenarios, I identify the following questions that could facilitate the cocreation of guiding principles in relation to the phenomenon of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died. As stated above, I submit that such questions could serve to facilitate the exploration and creation of guiding principles rather than the setting of policy. The notion of life after death offers many possibilities when cocreating principles. I offer the following questions for consideration: How might the findings of keeping in touch between persons who are living and persons who have died influence principles regarding the steps following a code procedure?; How might the findings of keeping in touch influence the development of principles to guide the care of the body after death?; How would the findings of keeping in touch support the development of principles that support persons who need to view the body of their loved one who died and remain in the room with them after death?; and, How would the findings of keeping in touch influence the development of principles that would enable and/or guide nurses and other caregivers to carry out the dying wishes of persons who have died?

I submit that the questions identified above could facilitate the cocreation of principles within focus groups comprised of policy makers, administrators, healthcare providers such as nurses and persons who keep in touch with their loved ones who have died. For example, the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association identified in a policy alert (Sept. 7, 2007) that Health Canada had established the Secretariat of Palliative and End-of-Life-Care in 2001. The purpose of the Secretariat was to facilitate the implementation of change initiatives. Unfortunately the working groups engaged in

developing and implementing strategies for palliative and end-of-life care were discontinued in 2007. Consequently the decision to discontinue the working groups created a gap in creating change initiatives in palliative and end-of-life care. Therefore, I propose that the development of focus groups with the purpose of developing guiding principles would be one way to address this gap. I posit that such guiding principles could have a profound influence at the government, community and individual levels. Also I submit that the cocreation of principles would serve to guide nursing practice in relation to persons who keep in touch with persons following death, persons who are dying or persons who have died and wish to *keep in touch* with their loved ones who are living. I propose that the cocreation of principles, which offer flexibility and guidance, rather than policy that is inherently rigid and rule based, would serve persons “when choices [of government, community and individuals] are clouded by conflicting values” (Wharf & Mackenzie, 2004, p. 2).

#### *Possibilities in Research*

Four of the participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this study and that research regarding keeping in touch with loved ones was being carried out. Participants stated that they were encouraged that their experiences were being acknowledged respectfully and considered in the development of new knowledge for practice, education, and further research.

Further, findings from this research indicate that through being involved in the study, the participants experienced new insights into relationships with their loved ones. For example, Janet and Eileen in particular expressed that they had further insights about their relationship with their loved one who had died. Similarly, Ketron (2008) found that

eight out of the twelve interview participants identified that the interview process facilitated insight regarding their relationship with their loved one.

In considering possibilities for future research it is interesting to note that in this study, all the participants are women. Further research with persons who are males may provide other insights in relation keeping in touch with loved ones who have died. Also, research regarding keeping in touch with persons who are not family members may provide further insights.

During the interviews, Eileen described profound childhood experiences of seeing her aunt as well as her grandfather after their deaths. She described her confusion as a child in relation to her mother's response to her disclosure of these experiences. Doris spoke of her young daughter's description that after she fell, she felt her grandmother, who had died, picked her up. Winokuer (2004) cites Normand, Silverman, and Nickman who posit that children who experienced continuing bonds had "a sense of comfort and solace, even though the relationship with their deceased parent changed over time" (p. 280). It is proposed that further research regarding children's experiences of keeping in touch, as well as the ways in which parents and healthcare providers can support children when they have significant experiences with their loved ones who have died would be beneficial.

I submit that further research to explore the experience of keeping in touch will provide opportunities to cocreate understandings regarding this phenomenon. One such area might be the phenomenon of person's experiences with what Eileen identified as triggers she associated with her loved one who had died. For example, Eileen spoke of the significance of triggers she associated with her grandfather. She described the

significance of how memories of special foods that she shared with grandfather when he was alive acted as triggers for her to keep in touch by talking to him after his death.

Moreover, I submit that further research to illuminate the ways in which family and friends as well as nurses and nursing students within practice, education, and administration, can support persons who keep in touch with their loved ones following death. Rothaupt and Becker (2007) provide an inspiring message for family therapists and researchers that I believe can serve to inspire nurses:

Bereavement research is experiencing a new dawn. Previous beliefs taken as fact are being challenged, and new methodologies are providing in-depth exploration into the art and transformation of bereavement. ...we are learning how to not only help mourners to survive and cope but to unfold their own stories and, in so doing, assisting them to thrive and grow in wisdom and understanding. Through this unfolding, we may be better equipped to aid those who mourn to embrace their wisdom and affirm their life and that of their deceased loved one. (p. 13)

Further, research findings can offer insights regarding the ways in which nurses and nursing students within practice, education, and administration can support persons who keep in touch with their loved one following death, as well as the family and friends who wish to support them.

This descriptive exploratory study, *Exploring Persons' Experiences of Keeping in Touch With Their Loved Ones Who Have Died*, using the theoretical framework of humanbecoming school of thought, is unique. It is hoped that this study will pave the way for future research.

#### *Reflecting on Limitations of the Study*

In this section I will address limitations of this study, in terms of possible critiques that might be offered. This descriptive exploratory study addressed the question: What is the meaning of persons' experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones

who have died? Some might query the underlying assumption of the research question, questioning whether or not after death communication is possible. However, as outlined in Chapter Two, I chose this research to offer a description of study participant experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who had died, not to debate the occurrence of after death communication. As previously articulated, the seven persons who volunteered to participate in this study believed in ‘keeping in touch with their loved ones who had died’ and experienced comfort from doing so. The commonality of believing in and experiencing comfort from this experience within this study population sheds light on the limitation posed by population self-selection. Further, the depth and breadth of study findings regarding the concept of keeping in touch are specific to the participants of this inquiry who happened to be all women. Although exploration of the phenomenon with men, or children, would contribute further insights about keeping in touch, those findings would be no more generalizable to all men or children as these study findings are to all women.

Moreover, while persons in other populations may share experiences of keeping in touch with loved ones who have died, it cannot be presumed that they will. To elaborate, I recognize that persons of particular cultures do not believe in or feel comfortable with, the acknowledgement of death or communication with the dead. For example, beliefs vary within different American Indian groups regarding how persons are to relate to others who have died (Walker & Balk, 2007). Walker and Balk cite Mandelbaum (1959) in saying that traditional beliefs of Hopi Indians are to fear death and quickly forget those who have died. Navajos do not fear death but avoid talking about persons who have died (McCabe, 1994). Within the Mayan Indian culture, widows

are considered to be unclean until they break their bonds with their husbands after death, which can influence their attempts to abbreviate their grieving period (Steele, 1977). These examples illustrate the need to consider that cultural beliefs in, or comfort with, after-death communication vary. Indeed, for some persons, after-death communication may evoke fear. Therefore, attention to various cultural beliefs as well as conduct of further research with persons from other cultures would offer further understandings of this phenomenon.

Another possible limitation of the study might be related to the analysis-synthesis process, where I chose not to return the data to the participants for their verification, as is common in qualitative research. This decision creates another opening for further research, where returning the data is explicitly included in the design. I chose instead to offer in the consent form, the possibility of a mutually agreed on, second discussion to clarify or offer further information. I did not receive any requests from participants for such a second meeting, and in the interest of being able to complete, in a timely manner, a beginning level of exploration on the concept, I did not initiate such a meeting myself. To follow up, I will make the thesis available to the participants and take note of comments they wish to offer.

#### *Reflecting on Accessibility Related to Theory and Research*

While engaged in writing the final draft of this thesis, the word “accessible” surfaced for me. I began to reflect on the word “accessibility” in relation to the theory of humanbecoming as well as the research process. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the word “accessible” as “[a]ble to be reached ... or understood” (Sykes, 1976, p. 7). I pondered, ‘How accessible is the theory and research process to others?’

*The Theory*

I wondered how accessible humanbecoming theory would be to others who were not familiar with it. As McCarthy & Aquino-Russell (2009, p. 39) say, “nursing theory is the light that guides a nurse’s way”, and, as they say about nursing guided by Parse’s theory, “nursing is so much more than the here and now”. These ideas are appealing to me, and I wonder whether the depth of the theory alluded to, in these quotes, is couched in language that might be unfamiliar to some nurses. While I believe the language of this theory is both enabling and limiting, until one understands the language Parse uses, the limiting aspects of it can take precedence over its enabling aspects. For example, with my graduate program study of the theory and research method, it is only recently that I believe I have begun to be able to articulate a grasp of how the postulate of illimitability theoretically expands the possibilities for “knowing” about the experience of keeping in touch.

In another example of my experience of learning about humanbecoming, I found that the theoretical concept of “transcendence” requires in depth study in order to understand and apply it to inquiry. I need to explore the question ‘What are humans transcending?’ In the process of completing this thesis, I found that according to Parse (1981,1998), humans transcend their contextual situations in that they “cocreate new possibles that arise from the context of situations” (Parse, 1998, p. 46). Transcendence is a way for humans to free themselves from limiting aspects of their contextual situations and choose from alternatives (Parse, 1981, 1998). However, when I reflect further on Parse’s use of the word context, I question how this resonates with the theoretical postulate of illimitability. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (Sykes, 1976) describes

context as “parts that precede or follow a passage and fix its meaning” (p.219), suggesting that humans are limited by their situations. The concept of illimitability is an idea that Parse (2007) describes as being “indivisible, unpredictable”, and “everchanging” (p. 308), which suggests that there are no limits to a human situation. For example, within humanbecoming theoretical principle three, Parse describes “human existence” as the human “coconstituting the situation and all-at-once cotranscending with it” (1998, p. 46). Further exploration of the concept of transcendence is needed to gain a better understanding of its intended meaning within the theory.

Additionally, I have been reflecting on my interview questions, which I developed early in the context of my engagement with learning about researching. I have come to wonder if my research findings could have been stronger if in the interview process I had included questions more clearly worded to attend to the foundational theoretical concepts. When I look at those questions now in that way, it frees me to ask a different kind of question. I wonder if the findings would have been different, under Objective Three (where transcendence is a key idea), if I had asked the participants, for instance, ‘What is next for you?’, or ‘What lies ahead for you and your loved one who has died?’. This insight might inform another study using this methodology.

Thus, these reflections leave me with further questions: How might this thesis, based on language within humanbecoming theory, enable-limit others who read it? Is the theory, used within this thesis, accessible to the study participants, nursing students, nurses, and those from other disciplines? These questions evoke unfolding reflections and further questions about the research process.

*The Research Process*

In my experience, the process of research informed by humanbecoming theory required intense study as well as guidance from a Parse scholar. Looking at another aspect of the research I wonder, ‘How accessible will the analysis-synthesis process illustrated in Chapter Four be to others who read it? In my experience, I needed to understand the process in order to use it. I found that each time I engaged in data analysis-synthesis, I discovered different synonyms that could express the themes in the language of the researcher. These different words allowed me to transcend taken-for-granted descriptions and to expand my views. As a novice researcher, engaged in my own becoming, each time I read the themes with an expanding view, I made new discoveries and gained an insight that one could, it would seem, go on forever. This left me with questions such as, ‘How will I know when the themes of this study are sound?’ However, in an unfolding understanding of the methodology I have learned to trust the humanbecoming researching process in that regard.

As I reflect further on the process of research in this thesis, I have the following questions: Will the analysis-synthesis process in Chapter Four be accessible to others who understand the research process within humanbecoming? Will the study participants, students, nurses and those from other disciplines be able to understand the process of analysis-synthesis in this study? Will the study participants in this study be able to understand how their experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who died were interpreted?’ These reflections leave me with more questions to ponder, another aspect of humanbecoming that is becoming more familiar to me.

*Reflecting on the Experience of Humanbecoming Research*

As stated in Chapter Three, the structure of this research study was originally based on the research title: *The Experience of Keeping in Touch With Persons Who Have Died for Persons Who Have Lost a Loved One*, as well as the theoretical themes of humanbecoming. This research question was based on the notion of participants having “lost” their loved ones through death. Consequently, the word “lost” was used in the study objectives. However, the study data illuminated that all participants did not feel that they had “lost” their loved one. I was relieved to find that the data overcame my original oversight of using the word “lost”, which is incongruent with a study on keeping in touch with persons after death that is framed within humanbecoming theory. The study data also surfaced that participants’ experiences with their loved ones who had died were literal as well as symbolic. From the original literature search and concept analysis, I had not anticipated that symbolic experiences would be part of the findings.

Within the analysis-synthesis process, as a novice researcher, I learned the art of ensuring that I organized the data according to the three research objectives. Great care was taken to ensure that data in one objective did not overlap another objective. For example, “dreams” were identified as being meaningful in objective one. However, it was decided that the deeper exploration of the data belonged to objective two as the participants engaged in patterns of relating within their dreams with their loved one who had died. I learned the art of moving the descriptive statements “up levels of abstraction to the level of the theory” (Parse, 2001, p.59). I engaged in learning how to write descriptions of the data in a way that honored the words of the participants during the interviews, while creating a narrative that carried the inherent life of their described experiences of keeping touch. I endeavored to

gracefully dwell within a process of uncertainty during the analysis-synthesis process. I found that by accepting the opportunity of uncertainty during the analysis-synthesis process, I was enabling the opportunity for discovery. I learned to be gentle with myself as I wrote and rewrote the descriptions and themes numerous times. At first, my writing was rather sterile, factual in nature. Gradually I learned to write in descriptive, concise, fluid ways that captured the meaning of the participant experiences. I experienced moments of discovery of how a sentence or theme seemed to resonate with the meaning expressed by the participants. I had an epiphany of how writing can become like singing. For me, the art of writing within the descriptive exploratory methodology is much like singing the music of meaning that honors the participants' experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones.

Indeed, I have encountered others who question why I would choose such a topic for a Master's degree in nursing. My answer is and will continue to be, because I know that this communication with loved ones who have died is possible, based on my personal experiences and through this and other research studies. I believe this research study provided data to show that the experience of keeping in touch is an ongoing occurrence for the seven participants in this study. This research study, which complied with the expectations of an ethical research process, addressed the ethical implications for both the participants and their loved ones who had died. Further, I believe this research provides an opportunity to respectfully request, on behalf of these research participants, and their loved ones who have died, that those who read this thesis acknowledge that there are persons who experience keeping in touch with loved ones after death. Moreover, as posited by Fisher (2001), there is an ethical component associated with the ongoing contact between persons and their loved ones who have died. Indeed, within the nursing

profession, practicing with respect and compassion for all persons are some of the values embedded within the Canadian nursing Code of Ethics (Canadian Nurses Association, 2008).

Thus, I offer this thesis to the reader as an opportunity to contemplate and explore the implications for respect and compassion in relation to others who keep in touch with their loved ones who have died. I invite the reader to reflect on the courage of these participants to speak about their experiences of keeping in touch despite their past experiences of disbelief, judgment, isolation, and dismissal by others. I encourage the reader to consider the comfort, insight, and personal growth that has been described by the research participants and the possibilities that the experiences of keeping in touch has for practice, education, policy, and further research within health care. As quoted in Chapter One, the queen responded to Alice in Wonderland, “I dare say you haven’t had much practice, why I’ve believed in at least six impossible things before breakfast” (Carroll, 1865). I invite you to believe in the integrity of the seven participants in this research study and what they had to say about their experiences of keeping in touch.

### *Summary*

This descriptive, exploratory study framed within Parse’s theory of humanbecoming addressed the research question: What is the meaning of persons’ experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who have died? Seven persons described their experiences of keeping in touch with their loved ones who had died.

Overarching study themes in the language of the participants were *treasured events and signs give rise to lasting comfort while constant yet changing bonds come with turmoil and tranquility amid unfolding strength and confidence*. Interpreted in the

language of the researcher, overarching study findings were written as *cherished ciphers and occurrences engender solace as enduring-shifting ties abide with ease unease amid fortifying expansion*. Study themes were linked primarily with theoretical concepts of *valuing imaging, connecting- separating and transforming*. Findings were discussed in light of relevant literature, and possibilities for nursing practice, education, policy and further research were offered.

As stated in Chapter One, this thesis tells my story as person/researcher and the stories of the seven study participants and their loved ones who died. During the unfolding research and writing process of this thesis, inspiring music weaved through the telling of the participant's stories. The inquiry process, guided by the humanbecoming provided the means by which to cocreate a beautiful musical. The analysis-synthesis process, guided by humanbecoming provided the musical score. The languaging of humanbecoming provided the means by which to cocreate lyrics that told the story of seven participants who keep in touch with their loved ones who had died. As a person/researcher, I learned how to explore, write and sing this musical. These songs were joyful-painful to sing! I am grateful to everyone who contributed to this musical entitled: Exploring Persons' Experiences of Keeping in Touch With Their Loved Ones Who Have Died.

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Appendix A: Nine Philosophical Assumptions of the Human Becoming Theory

1. The human is coexisting while coconstituting rhythmical patterns with the universe.
2. The human is open, freely choosing meaning in situation, bearing responsibility for decisions.
3. The human is unitary, continuously coconstituting patterns of relating.
4. The human is transcending multidimensionally with the possibles.
5. Becoming is unitary human-living-health.
6. Becoming is a rhythmically coconstituting human-universe process.
7. Becoming is the human's patterns of relating value priorities.
8. Becoming is an intersubjective process of transcending with the possibles.
9. Becoming is unitary human's emerging.

From: Parse, R. R. (1998). *The human becoming school of thought*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## Appendix B: Criteria for Appraisal of Qualitative Research

### *Criteria for Appraisal of Qualitative Research: Conceptual, Ethical, Methodological, and Interpretive Dimensions*

#### Conceptual

- how does the phenomenon under study relate to the phenomenon of concern to the discipline?
- how does the discipline-specific knowledge underpin the frame of reference?
- how does the research question flow from the frame of reference?

#### Ethical

- how does the plan of study meet standards of scientific merit?
- how does the study contribute to the unique discipline-specific knowledge?
- how are participants' rights protected?
- how does the researcher treat the data in light of accuracy and authenticity?
- are the credentials and experience of the researcher adequate for the conduction of the study?

#### Methodological

- is the method identified correctly?
- are participants, the text, or the art forms appropriate for the method?
- is the participant selection process appropriate for the method?
- is the data-gathering process appropriate for the method?
- is the data analysis-synthesis process appropriate for the method?
- how does the researcher show conceptual shifts in levels of abstraction?
- how do the abstract statements evolve from the participants' descriptions, the text, or the artforms?
- is the path of inquiry easily identifiable?

- is the path of inquiry logical from question to findings?

#### Interpretive

- how do the interpretive statements correspond to the findings?
- to what extent are the findings interpreted in light of the conceptualization of the study?
- how do heuristic implications reflect an accurate interpretation of the findings?
- how are the interpretations woven with the theory, research, and when appropriate, practice?

From: Parse, R. R. (2001). *Qualitative inquiry: The path of sciencing* (p. 245). Sudbury, MA:

Jones and Bartlett Publishers.

## Appendix C: Advertisement

*Keeping in Touch with Loved Ones Who Have Died*

Would you like to volunteer to participate in a research study about your experience of keeping in touch with your loved one who has died? I am a graduate student at the University of Victoria. I am interested in interviewing persons to explore the experience of “keeping in touch” with loved ones who have died. A General Social Survey in the U.S.A. polled 40,000 people from 1972 to 2000 and found that a belief in the ability to interact with deceased persons was common and the experience of being in touch with someone who died occurred frequently (Park & Benore, 2006). I invite you to volunteer to participate in my research project if you are over 19 years of age, speak English and “keep in touch” by sensing, feeling, hearing, seeing, knowing or speaking with a loved one who had died. If you feel comfortable being interviewed at this time after the loss of your loved one and are interested in volunteering to participate in a digitally recorded participant-researcher interview with me or would like further details, please contact the researcher, Chris Upright at: (250) 370-9799.

#### Appendix D: Invitation to Participate

This is a letter to invite persons who may be interested in volunteering to participate in a research study that explores the experience of keeping in touch with a loved one who has died. I am a graduate student conducting a study titled: *The Experience of Keeping in Touch with Persons Who Have Died for Persons Who Have Lost a Loved One*. This project will contribute toward the partial fulfillment of requirements for a degree of Master in Nursing in Policy and Practice.

As a daughter, nurse and educator, I have experienced and have heard numerous stories of keeping in touch with a loved one who has died. The experience of keeping in touch may be described for some people as sensing, feeling, hearing, seeing, knowing, or speaking with a person who has died. I am interested in learning about your experience of keeping in touch with your loved one who has died.

An abundance of research supports the view that continuing contact or communication with persons who have died is a consoling and deeply personal experience for persons who have lost a loved one. Still, there are many questions associated with this experience. For example, how does keeping in touch with a loved one influence the ongoing relationship with him or her? How does keeping in touch shape a person's hopes and dreams related to a loved one who has died? The exploration of such questions will offer new understandings of the experience of keeping in touch. Such understandings will inform and guide practicing nurses to be with people in ways that are respectful and supportive of their experiences. Similarly, nurse educators can introduce students to the findings of this research that also shape their ways of being with people within practice. Further, this research can inform administrators who may be involved in policy development that supports persons after the death of a loved one.

If you feel comfortable being interviewed at this time since the loss of your loved one and you are interested in volunteering to participate in a digital voice recorded participant-researcher interview about your experiences of keeping in touch with your loved one who has died or if you would like more information about this study, please contact the researcher, Chris Upright at:

Telephone: (250) 370-9799  
E-mail: [cupright@shaw.ca](mailto:cupright@shaw.ca).

Thank you for considering this invitation.

## Appendix E: Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study entitled: *The Experience of Keeping in Touch with Persons Who Have Died for Persons Who Have Lost a Loved One*. This study is being conducted by myself, Christine Upright, a graduate student at the University of Victoria, Faculty of Human and Social Development, School of Nursing. You may contact me if you have further questions at (250) 370-9799 or [cupright@shaw.ca](mailto:cupright@shaw.ca). As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master's of Nursing degree. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Northrup, R.N. PhD, Associate Professor, University of Victoria School of Nursing; you may contact my supervisor at (250) 472-4609 or [dnorthru@uvic.ca](mailto:dnorthru@uvic.ca). If, after reviewing this document, you have further questions about this consent or study, you may contact the other member of my supervisory committee as follows:

Dr. Mary Ellen Purkis, committee member, at (250) 721-8050 or [hsddean@uvic.ca](mailto:hsddean@uvic.ca)

The purpose of this research project is to explore and describe the experience of keeping in touch with a loved one who has died. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- a) To describe the meaning of keeping in touch with persons who have died for persons who have lost a loved one.
- b) To describe how keeping in touch with a loved one influences the ongoing relationship with him or her.
- c) To describe personal hopes, concerns and possibilities related to keeping in touch with a loved one who has died.

Research of this type is important because it will contribute to knowledge development about the experience of keeping in touch between living and deceased persons. Such knowledge has the capacity to inform the lay public as well as health care professionals about this very sensitive and often misunderstood experience. The findings from this study will make contributions to nursing practice, nursing education, and policy development. New understandings gleaned from this study will guide practicing nurses and nursing students to be with people in ways that are respectful and supportive of their experiences. Also, the findings from this research will inform policy development that is intended to support persons after the death of a loved one.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you demonstrated interest in and/or responded to my advertisement in a newspaper about a research study about the experience of keeping in touch with a loved one who has died. If you feel comfortable being interviewed at this time since the loss of your loved one and agree to voluntarily participate this research, you will be asked to engage in one to two face to face digitally voice recorded interviews with the researcher about the experience of keeping in touch with your loved one who has died. Interviews will take place at a time and location mutually agreeable to both you and myself. Each interview session may last from 45 minutes to one hour. You may decline to have the interview digitally recorded and/or decline to answer any question during the interview. You may reduce or extend interview

times as you wish, and you and I may agree to hold a second interview to clarify or offer further information. It is anticipated that you will be one of 5 to 7 persons participating in individual interviews with myself. It is not anticipated that this study will cause inconvenience to you.

Potential risks related to participating in this research may include: an emotional feeling of being upset or a physical feeling of being fatigued when talking about keeping in touch with your loved one who has died. To prevent or to deal with these risks the following steps will be taken: a) I will offer and provide time for you to express your feelings; b) I will ask if you wish to stop the interview until you feel more settled and after you have settled, ask if you wish to proceed with the interview; c) I will remind you that you can end the interview at any time during the session; d) I will inform you that you can contact me, at the telephone number provided, following the interview to talk about concerns that may have surfaced for you because of the research; e) I will remind you that you can contact my thesis supervisor; f) Before the interview begins, I will provide you with a list of some names and telephone numbers of available support services. Upon your request, or if I feel it may be helpful to you, I will remind you that you can contact a support service from the list provided to you.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include:

- a) To you as a participant: To have the opportunity for someone to listen to your experiences of keeping in touch with your loved one who has died. To have the opportunity to reflect on your personal experience of keeping in touch.
- b) To society: To provide research findings that inform the general public, nurses and nursing students, educators and institutional administrators of the experience of keeping in touch with deceased persons for persons who have lost a loved one.
- c) To the state of knowledge: To contribute to knowledge development that extends limited yet growing scholarly work related to communication between living and deceased persons. This work legitimizes this experience for many people and enhances the capacity to raise awareness of this often hidden or invisible experience. These findings will offer new insights and understandings that may have usefulness for professional practice and education as well as policy development.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequence or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, the information you have shared to the point of withdrawing will not be used in the research and will be disposed of in the following ways: your personal information and data transcribed on paper will be shredded and recycled; the digital voice recording will be deleted; any interview data that has been placed on CD will be erased; and data placed in a computer file will be deleted.

If both you and I agree to hold a second interview to clarify and/or offer further information, your initial consent to participate in a second interview will be confirmed in discussion prior to your continued participation in this study.

Your anonymity will be completely maintained throughout the research process in various ways. Your identity will not be revealed in any way by myself. Pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants as well as participant loved ones who have died and will be used throughout transcriptions. Any identifying information will be removed from digital recordings, CDs, and transcripts. Only pseudonyms will be used for purposes of scholarly presentation and/or any publication or portrayal of study findings. One copy of the list of participant names, telephone numbers, addresses, demographic data, and consent forms will be kept in a locked box in a locked filing cabinet separate from all interview data. Digital voice recordings from the interviews will be tracked through number codes only. I as the researcher will be the only person responsible for transcribing interview data from the digital recordings to paper.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected. Digital voice recordings, CDs containing interview data, and transcribed data will be placed in a locked box in a locked filing cabinet that is kept in a separate location from all forms and/or lists containing any identifying information related to participants. Transcribed data will be available to myself, my supervisor, and supervisory committee members (if requested) alone.

At the completion of this study, the participant list and signed consent forms will be shredded and recycled. Anonymized data will be kept for purposes of possible secondary analysis in a future research. All data, including digital voice recordings, interview data placed on CDs, and computer files will be deleted or erased upon completion of secondary analysis or if I decide that the data from this study will not be used for secondary analysis.

It is anticipated that the findings of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: a) presentations in scholarly and public forums; b) journal publications; and c) possibly the development of a dramatic play that depicts this human experience in a way that makes sense for people. Your words and stories from the interview may be paraphrased and/or used verbatim in the script of such a play. As stated above, anonymity and confidentiality regarding persons and places will be maintained in all presentations and publications.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250) 472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by myself.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant                      Signature                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher                      Signature                      Date

**A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.**

## Appendix F: Participant Demographic Data Questionnaire

Code No: \_\_\_\_\_

Please fill in your personal information in the lines provided below:

- 1) Relationship to your loved one who has died \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Age \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Occupation \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Education \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Religious affiliation \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Cultural background \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G: List of Support Services

## Citizens Counseling Centre

Counseling for individuals, couples and groups

Sliding scale fee based on family income

Office hours: 10am-2pm Monday to Friday

24 hour answering machine service

Telephone: (250) 384-9934

E mail: [info@citizenscounseling.com](mailto:info@citizenscounseling.com)

941 Kings Rd

Victoria, B.C.

V8T 1W7

## Cascadia Counseling Clinic

Specializes in loss and grief

Funding may be available

Services offered 7 days a week

Day and evening hours

Telephone: (250) 216-1569

E mail: [info@cascadiaclinic.com](mailto:info@cascadiaclinic.com)

300-755 Queens Ave.

Victoria, B.C.

V8T 1M7

## Need Crisis and Information Line

A telephone only support and information service

Free service

Available 24 hours a day 7 days a week

Telephone: (250) 386-6323

E mail: [admin@needcrisis.bc.ca](mailto:admin@needcrisis.bc.ca)

PO Box 5501

Victoria, B.C.

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