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By

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LOSING OUR PARENTS: MEANING-MAKING AND CREATIVITY
IN THE LIVES OF SURVIVING ADULT DAUGHTERS

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

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DEDICATION

In Loving Memory

Parents

William Wayne Little
(1926-1994)
and
Mary Frances Cook Little
(1928-1996)

and

Beloved Husband

David Franklin Heidelberg
(1946-1984)

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ABSTRACT

Death, especially the death of a parent, causes us to re-examine our fundamental assumptions about life and we are charged with working on the meaning of our loss. We are affected on the physical, spiritual, and emotional levels when someone we care for dies. Those who are unable to cope with such loss may be vulnerable to premature illness, exhaustion, and even death. Coping with the death of a loved one is more than getting over the experience and moving on.

The literature and research suggests that creative expression, such as telling our stories, is an important strategy for finding meaning in loss. This study seeks to discover if surviving adult daughters construct personal meaning after the loss of both parents by using other forms of creative expression in addition to or in place of narrative and storytelling processes. Models and theories of loss stress that loss and mourning constitute a crisis of meaning. These theories, along with recent studies that reflect how emotions and imagination work alongside the cognitive and rational processes of meaning-making, provide an interpretative framework for understanding the use of creative expression as a way to construct personal meaning.

This phenomenological study used depth interviews to discover if adult daughters use creative expression to construct personal meaning after the loss of both parents. Seven women, between the ages of 39 and 57, who had lost both parents and were at least two years into the grieving process, were interviewed.

Five themes emerged from the study: Relationships, Stories of Loss, Changes, Importance of Family, and Creative Expression After Loss. All of the women used forms of creative expression to construct meaning after the loss of their parents.

Meaning is discovered within the creative process. Creativity results in a metaphor for meaning. The women expressed that they were unable to move forward until they were able to tell their stories to those close to them. These women discovered ways to remember and celebrate the lives of their parents and to maintain a relationship with their lost loved ones.

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Losing Our Parents and the Search For Meaning

Marsha - 1994

The buzzing sounded far away. Groggily I stretched my left hand across my body fumbling for the top of the clock radio. As I slapped at the alarm button, I realized the buzzing was actually ringing on the other side of the bed. My husband answered the phone as I tried to rouse myself from sleep. He turned his head, mumbling over his shoulder it was for me and I should take it in the kitchen. Before I could ask who was calling, he was waving me aside as he pulled the blankets over his head. I glanced at the clock. No one I knew called after midnight, at least not with anything good to say. I hurried down the hallway, my heart pounding as I flipped on the light switch and lifted the telephone receiver.

"Hello?"

"Marsha, this is Will," my brother-in-law said. "The hospital just called and told Regina she should come right now. She's on her way. I told her I'd call you."

"What about Mother?" I asked.

"She's getting the neighbors to drive her. I don't know anything else. You probably should call the hospital and find out what's going on."

"I'll call right now. Thanks, Will."

I hung up the phone and then dialed, from memory, the number for Medical City Hospital in Dallas. My father had been in and out of that hospital so often over so many years, my sister and I knew the number by heart. I knew Daddy was back in the hospital, but his diabetes often landed him there for a week or so. He always bounced back. It was just routine. The hospital operator finally answered and connected me with the nurses' station on the intensive care unit.

"I just got a call from my brother-in-law that there's an emergency with my father, Wayne Little. He said you told my mother and sister to come in."

"Yes," the nurse said. "Let me get his nurse for you."

A new voice said, "Your father isn't doing very well." There was hesitation in this voice.

"Look," I said, "I live in Virginia. I need to know what's happening."

There was a pause…

"I'm sorry, but you're father just died. In fact, the doctors are still in the room working on him."

My world began to shrink to a single blue flower on the linoleum as the voice rushed on.

"The evening nurse was checking his vital signs when his blood pressure suddenly dropped. The cardiologist happened to be on the floor and was in there immediately. The crash cart was right beside his door. But nothing worked. They tried, but there was nothing anyone could do. Your father was just gone."

"My mother," I began. "My mother is on her way. She has cancer. Please look after her."

I don't remember saying goodbye or hanging up the phone. Numbly I walked down the hall to the bedroom. Standing in the doorway, I tried to speak. Finally the words came forth.

"Daddy is dead." I crumpled to the floor.

My daddy was gone.

* * *

A few hours later the telephone rang again. This time I reached for it as I sat on the edge of the bed. I knew it was my mother calling to tell me the news. I could see her sitting in the hospital waiting room, clutching the telephone to her ear. Hearing her voice made the loss even more terrible. She was frail and seriously ill. She was four weeks into chemotherapy for ovarian cancer. And now, 1,500 miles away from me, she was trying to find the words to tell me my daddy was gone.

I don't know why, but it seemed wrong to blurt out that I already knew he was gone. That I knew, while she was anxiously riding in a neighbor's car during that 30-minute drive to the hospital, he was dead.

That I knew, while my sister drove an hour with cold fear freezing her heart, he was dead. That I knew, 1,500 miles away, he was dead. As I heard the words from her lips, I felt as though I was six years old. I was somewhere in a dark tunnel and I desperately needed someone to turn on the light.

"I love you Mommy," I said softly.

"I love you, too, baby," she said.

And the darkness remained and I felt completely alone as I hung up the phone and curled into my husband's waiting arms.

* * *

Just before dawn I finally fell into a deep sleep. I dreamed I was carrying a tray as I walked down a cafeteria line. My father was piling large servings of every dish onto a plate. Smiling, he handed the plate to me.

"I didn't have much," he said, "but I always gave you the best of what I had."

And then I woke up.

Twelve years ago my father died unexpectedly from complications of diabetes. A year and a half later my mother died from ovarian cancer. I knew my father wouldn't live much longer, but the women in my family lived well into their nineties. My mother's illness and death were not part of our growing old together scenario. My mother, grandmother, and I joked we would all have adjoining rooms in the nursing home. But, life doesn't read or heed the scripts we create. My support system was gone. I found myself automatically dialing my mother's phone number whenever something good or bad happened in my life, only to realize no one would answer. Orphaned at the age of 42, I felt as though my very identity was slipping away. Adults aren't orphaned when their parents die, or are they? No one had

warned me that I would feel this way. My world was irrevocably altered. I was now the older generation, the next in line to die.

The loss of those we love is inevitable. When we lose someone we love, we are affected on every level – physical, spiritual, and emotional (James & Friedman, 1998; Muller & Thompson, 2003, July). If we live long enough, we will experience the loss of our parents or someone else who is important to us, whether by death, separation, or divorce. Our worlds will change and we must find a way to cope with our loss.

Background

We experience many relationships during our lifetime: siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, spouses, partners, and significant others, but the longest is the relationship with our parents. Few studies examine how adults react to the loss of a parent. This may be attributed to the perception by Americans that death of the aged is natural and as a culture we don't encourage a prolonged period of grief (Katzenbaum, 1977; Kerr, 1994). This perception belies the reality of the human need to understand the death of a parent.

> In general, however, we all have loose ends, unfinished business, with our parents when they die. It has been reported that in the months following the loss of a parent, surviving adult offspring show greater incidences of spousal abuse, drunkenness, and extramarital affairs, as well as conflicts among siblings (Ackner, 1993). …why might such patterns be associated with a parent's death? Probably the best answer is that the death may shake up the person's life in a way such that the person feels he or she no longer has an anchor. (Harvey, 2000, p. 55)

Responses to losses of any kind are emotional, cognitive, physical, and behavioral (Muller & Thompson, 2003, July; Parkes, 1996). The Holmes-Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale (T. H. Holmes & Rahe, 1967; T. S. Holmes & Holmes, 1970; Reale, 1987, July) rates death of a close family member with a stress value of 63. Only death of a spouse (100), divorce (73), and marital separation (65) rate higher stress values than does the death of a close family member. Rarely is the death of a close family member the only stressful event in

an individual's life at the time of the loss. Too many stressful events, whether "good" or "bad," will disrupt the stability of a person's life. According to Reale:

> If the person can't cope effectively with these changes, he may develop faulty adaptive responses that can lead to a state of sustained psychological arousal. Eventually, if this stressful state continues day in and day out, he'll become exhausted and physically ill. (1987, July, p. 54)

Other studies have found that the death of a family member "increases vulnerability to premature illness and death for surviving family members (Osterweis, Solomon, & Green, 1984), especially for a widowed spouse and for parents who have recently lost a child (Huygen, van den Hoogen, van Eijk, & Smits, 1989)" (McGoldrick & Walsh, 1991, p. 2).

An important coping strategy for dealing with major losses involves working on the meanings of these losses (Harvey, 2001). According to Berman (1991), the central activity of human beings is the creation of meaning. We need to assign meaning to life and to the events that affect our lives. Fisher and Specht (1999) found that creativity may help adults cope more effectively with the circumstances of life, especially in later life.

> Adaptability, flexibility, and coping are inherent in the creative process as well. Creative activity (whether artistic or not) is a process whereby the individual seeks an original solution to a problem or challenge at hand and, therefore, the process itself demands that the individual be open to new ideas and approaches (Mariske & Willis, 1998). (Fisher & Specht, 1999, para. 9)

Zeitlin and Harlow (2001) discuss the ways people have used creative expression to:

> …transform and even transcend difficult situations. Many traditional responses to death involve the creative impulse through stories, music, art, and rituals connected to funerary rites. In our time, in addition to these traditions and sometimes in lieu of them, it has become increasingly common to find mourners and the terminally ill engaged in personal – and often shared – creative acts. (p. 3)

Defining Creativity

Creativity is unique to humans. It is not restricted to only a gifted few. Morgan (1997) makes the following observations regarding creativity:

> Creativity can be defined as a "unique mental process leading to the expansion of experienced reality beyond the already established category and classification of it" (Havelka, 1986, p. 156). It is a uniquely human gift; not part of the material world, but "a privilege of spiritual organisms" (Maritain, 1953, p. 56). Essentially, creativity is an urge to expand in every dimension of being meaningfully alive. Every person desires to be creative, to fulfill the need to form, shape and express deep feeling (H. Mitchell, 1990). (pp. 351-352)

Creativity is not just for the young. It's important at every age and stage of life.

> Creativity is a mysterious thing. It's an attribute of every human being, not just the great and gifted, not just the young. Age can bring an enriched sense of self, and, often, people are more creative in their later years. Creativity is the expression of the human spirit – to be studied, cultivated, and cherished (Goldman, 1991, p. 41). (Hickson & Housley, 1997, p. 541)

Often we think only a few gifted individuals are capable of creating art. But art and creativity encompass more than just creating the Mona Lisa or writing a great literary masterpiece. Traditionally, the arts have been divided into three categories: the servile arts, the liberal arts, and the fine arts. The servile arts are concerned with the production of something useful, such as a clean room, boiled water, or a vacuumed floor. The liberal arts are concerned with the production of a liberated mind. The fine arts are concerned with the production of products that "embody a vision" (Morgan, 1997, p. 351). Creative expression, as used in this study, is not limited to the fine arts. "Creativity can be expressed through singing, cooking, gardening, crafts, writing, organizing a group, and volunteering, to name just a few" (Fisher & Specht, 1999, para. 99).

Coping with Death

A flexible, creative attitude toward life is an important skill for coping with life (Sternberg, 2000). Mariske and Willis (1998) refer to this as "practical creativity." Poon, Martin, Clayton, Messner, Noble, and Johnson (1992) call this "resourcefulness" (Fisher & Specht, 1999, para. 4). The ability to use creative thinking skills is key to making successful

personal adjustments. Our personal world is constantly changing. Creativity can help as we grow psychologically and cope with these changes (Goff, 1992 in Fisher & Specht, 1999).

We experience many relationships during our lifetime. We also experience many losses. Loss results in grief. Some theorists describe the process of grief as three stages or tasks that must be accomplished in order to successfully complete the grieving process. First, we must intellectually accept the loss. Second, we must emotionally accept the loss. Third, we must change our model of our inner and outer world to align with this new reality (Parkes & Weiss, 1983; Viederman, 1989). Colin Murray Parkes later (1996) used the term "psychosocial transitions" to describe grief. He described the psychosocial transitions as four phases: "shock and numbness; yearning and searching; disorganization and despair; and reorganization" (Thompson, 2002, p. 4). Worden (1991) uses four stages in his task model of the grieving process. Doka (1997) lists Worden's four stages and adds a fifth stage. Doka believed it is important to give "attention to the struggle to find meaning in the loss that is the heart of the spiritual crisis in grief" (p. 252). Worden's list and Doka's fifth stage are:

1. To accept the reality of the loss;
2. To work through the pain of grief;
3. To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing;
4. To emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life;
5. To rebuild philosophical or faith systems challenged by loss. (Doka, 1997, pp. 252-253)

These task models have been useful in understanding the stages and transitions of the process of grief recovery. But do we really "recover" from loss? Is it more or less a journey to discover meaning? What becomes of our world when we lose someone or something that is important to us?

The relationship with our parents is, perhaps, one of our longest – our world has always assumed their presence. What happens to surviving adult children when their parents

die? Death, especially the death of one's parent, causes us to re-examine our fundamental assumptions about life. Morgan (1997) looks at the lessons of death.

> Death teaches us the absolute limits of life as we know it. Sickness is an "uncovering of the limitations and fragility of our earthly condition" (Lepargneur, 1974, p. 91). Personal disasters such as the death of a child or a spouse end the feelings of security with which we may have grown. Fundamental assumptions of life are overthrown. Beliefs about the justice and orderliness of the universe are challenged and what remains is the feeling of helplessness (Kleber & Blom, 1988). (p. 349)

Janoff-Bulman (1992) referred to this idea as "shattered assumptions." According to Harvey (2000):

> Janoff-Bulman contends that we are socialized to believe that the world is a benign place, it is a meaningful place, and that we are worthy people. Each of these assumptions is susceptible to be shattered when events such as senseless violence occur to us or our loved ones. (p. 24)

Berman (1991) believes the central activity of human beings is the creation of meaning. We need to assign meaning to life and to the events that affect our lives. An important coping strategy for dealing with major losses involves working on the meanings of these losses (Harvey, 2001). Harvey (2000) argues:

> …the key to trying to transform losses into something that is positive is the hard work of mind and spirit to give our losses meaning, to learn and gain insights from them, and to impart to others something positive based on the experience. Not all of us will be so inclined to search diligently for meaning in our losses. Not all of us will want to learn from them. Not all of us will use loss experience to motivate us toward helping others who also are struggling with their diminished hopes and resources. (pp. 3-4)

We do not emerge from the grieving process the same people we were before the death of our loved one. We cannot forget. We cannot simply start over again.

> Viewing mourning as a process of meaning reconstruction captures the idiosyncratic nature of the experience and acknowledges that the primary task is not one of returning to pre-loss functioning, but of developing a meaningful life without the deceased loved one (Wortman & Silver, 2001). (Servaty-Seib, 2004, April, para. 18)

Victor Frankl (1959) lived through the Nazi death camps and used his experiences to help clients move toward meaningful pursuits. He emphasized "…acts of meaning such as

reaching out and connecting with someone else, making a creative work, and adopting an attitude of hope as steps that may facilitate the construction of meaning" (Harvey, 2000, pp. 6-7). Harvey, in his book *Give Sorrow Words*, finds storytelling a viable approach to dealing with major loss. He believes it is important how people deal with loss.

> What is important is how we see our lives and our losses as inextricably related to those of others – past, present, and future – and how we choose to make use of what transpires in our lives for the benefit of humanity as a whole. As Erikson (1963) defined it, such use of our lives is "generative" in its contribution to future generations. (2000, p. 208)

Transforming Loss – Creating Meaning

Mourning is a crisis of meaning (Hagman, 2001). Storytelling, ritual, and commemorative art have been used to find meaning in loss (Zeitlin & Harlow, 2001). Pollock (1989) believes a creative outcome is the end result of the successful completion of the mourning process. It does not matter whether the creator is gifted or not. Pollock takes the process a step further. He believes "…that the mourning process may be a critical factor in the creative process even without object loss through death" (1989, p. 30).

We have a need to create a coherent, meaningful, and memorable life story. Once the initial emotional responses of despair, devastation, and anger over the death of a loved one subside, creative responses help the survivors to move on despite grief (Zeitlin & Harlow, 2001). Family and friends remember the passed life. It is as though those who remain must find ways to remember, to give meaning to the life that has passed as well as to their own. Zeitlin and Harlow (2001) note:

> When those close to us die, we are charged with remembering. Our stories are memory's tools. They capture the essence of a life and make it portable. They provide a way to preserve and recall mannerisms, foibles, grandeur, and courage. The dead can no longer speak for themselves; their memories, who they were, and in some sense, who they continue to be, are with those who remain. The living give them voice. (p. 60)

Often the bereaved use creative personal projects to help them own their past. These creative projects, created from our memories, "… capture the essence of a person who has died and serve to evoke his or her presence among the living" (Zeitlin & Harlow, 2001, p. 4). Morgan (1997) notes:

> Through the arts, one can confront life and death on many levels at once. By engaging in an experience in the arts, people can be assisted as they mourn, grieve, celebrate life; they can overcome fragmentation, and find a sense of meaning in their lives. Because the arts are regenerators of the body, mind, emotions, and spirit, persons can be enabled to live more fully while they are dying and grieving. (p. 358)

Hannah Segal (1952) believed:

> [In the unconscious of all artists] all creation is really a recreation of a once loved and once whole, but now lost and ruined object, a ruined internal world and self. It is when the world within us is destroyed, when it is dead and loveless, when our loved ones are in fragments – it is then that we must – re-create our world anew, reassemble the pieces, infuse life into dead fragments, re-create life. (p. 199 in Pollock, 1989, p. 35)

According to Klein (1940):

> In acute mourning suffering can become productive. We know that painful experiences of all kinds sometimes stimulate sublimations, or even bring out quite new gifts in some people, who may take to painting, writing or other productive activities under the stress of frustrations and hardships. Others become more productive in a different way – more capable of appreciating people and things, more tolerant in their relationships with others – they become wiser. (p. 143, in Pollock, 1989, p. 33-34)

Fisher and Specht (1999), in their study on the meanings older people attached to successful aging and its relationship to creative activity, found the finished product is not as important to the creator as is the experience of the dynamics of the creative process itself.

> What is intriguing about this set of responses is that the vast majority focus not on the finished product of creation, but, the internal dynamics (i.e., motivation, attitude, imagination) vital to the creative process. Creative activity is less about the products resulting from the process as it is about the process itself. It is a process through which the individual transforms insights of the inner self into some concrete external expression of that self. (para. 80)

Adult Daughters and the Loss of Parents

Rita Butchko Kerr (1994) examined the meanings adult daughters attach to a parent's death. She was interested in the meanings the daughters found (not in the manner those meanings were expressed) for several reasons.

> First, little is understood about how adults face the dissolution of one of the longest relationships in their life, the relationship with parents. Although some investigators consider grief a transitory process, grieving over the death of a parent may be a significant and lasting event in adult daughters' lives. (p. 347)

Kerr also found those adult daughters who viewed the death of their parents as a negative experience "tended to focus on themselves, their sense of loss, their feelings of helplessness, and loss of self, and the personal pain they suffered as a result of the death" (p. 352). Those adult daughters who reported a positive aspect to a parent's death found "a sense of relief that the parent's suffering had ended, or the parent had died before potential suffering had begun. In addition, some used the parent's death as a vehicle for their own personal growth" (p. 352). Adult daughters reported finding the death of the second parent harder. "With the loss of both parents, they became the older generation. As opposed to ruminating about earlier stages of family life, …[they] tended to focus on their own aging and death" (Kerr, 1994, p. 355).

According to Fisher and Specht (1999) we find meaning as a result of the creative process. Finding meaning is more than discovering how our lives have been altered and transformed after a loss. It's often about discovering a way to find meaning in the life of the lost loved one and a way to maintain that meaning and relationship in our lives. The literature and research does not examine how surviving adult daughters construct meaning after the loss of one or both parents. Narrative processes and styles of storytelling have been the focus of most meaning-making research (Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002). However, there is not currently enough evidence to suggest that storytelling works or applies to everyone

(Harvey, 2000). There has been little research to discover if mourners use other forms of creative expression to reconstruct or find meaning after loss. Meaning reconstruction theory views grieving as a personal process that is bound up in our sense of self (Neimeyer, 2001b). If indeed the way we grieve is personal and "shaped by that unique fund of beliefs, practical skills, resources and relational dispositions that defines our very sense of self in social context" (Neimeyer & Anderson, p. 50), are there not other forms of creative expression that we might use to construct personal meaning after the loss of one or both parents? Do surviving adult daughters use other forms of creative expression, in addition to or in place of storytelling, to discover how their lives are changed and transformed after their parents' deaths, the meaning in the lives lived by their parents, and ways to perpetuate those meanings and relationships in their lives? Few, if any, studies exist regarding the use of other creative forms of expression to tell stories of loss (i.e., drama, art, music, dance, etc.).

Conclusions

Coping with death is more than just "getting over it and moving on." We must recreate our life story after traumatic loss. This requires a flexible and creative attitude toward life. Initially, we experience despair, devastation, and anger at the loss of our loved one. After these initial responses subside, our creative responses help us move forward and find meaning in our experience. The ability to use creative thinking skills is key to making personal adjustments to the losses life inevitably brings our way. In addition to cognitively recognizing loss and emotionally accepting the loss, we must find new meaning and reconstruct our shattered assumptions about the world and our place within it. Death of a parent pushes us to re-examine our fundamental assumptions about life. As human beings, we are charged with the task of assigning meaning to life and the events that affect our lives. We do not emerge from the grieving process the same people we were before our loss.

Creativity may be the end result of successful mourning. Creativity may even require mourning, whether that mourning is a result of a loss by death or not. The processes of creativity and meaning-making are bound together.

CHAPTER TWO – RELATIONSHIPS

Attachment and Loss

Marsha - 1952

A car door slammed as Frances picked the baby up from the freshly sheeted mattress in the wooden playpen. Wayne was home from working the swing shift at the aluminum plant. Smiling, she patted the baby's diapered rump and turned to meet her husband at the front door. Because Wayne worked nights and slept days, Frances and the baby did, too. So, supper was ready and the baby was bathed and ready for bed by 7 a.m. each day. The front door opened as Frances reached up and smoothed her hair.

"Hi, honey. How was your shift?"

Wayne's uniform was crumpled and sweat-stained. Texas in September was hot and in 1952 air conditioning was still considered a luxury. Tired and dirty, his blue eyes sparkled as he looked from the face of his wife to that of his two-month-old daughter.

"Well, baby. I'm doin' fine now."

He set his thermos and lunch kit on the coffee table as he crossed to his wife and child. He kissed Frances and started to take the baby from her arms.

"Now, Wayne, you're filthy and I just washed and changed her."

"Aw, just a quick hug."

"No. No. Go get cleaned up. Then you two can play. I've got your bath water all ready."

Disappointed, but laughing, Wayne gave Marsha's big toe a squeeze as he kissed the top of her curly blonde head. Hurrying toward the tiny bathroom he said, "Don't you be givin' all your sugar to your mama."

Wayne was pretty quick for a 350-pound man. Soon he returned to the kitchen, wearing boxer shorts and a sleeveless Army-style tee shirt and carrying the baby in his arms. Frances had supper set on the table. She looked at the pair and smiled. Life was very good. They had been married three years and were living in a new house filled with new furniture. Finally, something of their very own. Wayne had a good job; no more moving from job to job. And of course, Marsha made their little family complete. Yes, Frances was very happy. This was how life was supposed to be.

After supper, Wayne and Frances got ready for bed. The bedroom was the only room in the house that was air-conditioned. The little window unit droned steadily, drowning out the daytime noises of the neighborhood. Curtains helped create a dim, cool hide-away for the young family. Marsha was already lying on her stomach in the baby bed. Frances drew the tiny pink crocheted blanked over her shoulders. Then she crawled into the bed next to Wayne. He drew her next to him and held her. Smiling, Frances closed her eyes.

Suddenly Wayne was throwing the sheet off and getting out of bed.

"Wayne! What's the matter?"

"Oh, I can't stand it. That baby is way over on the other side of the bed and she looks so lonely."

He gently lifted Marsha out of the bed and carried her to their bed. He lay on his back and placed the baby on her rounded tummy against his mountainous one, her tiny head on his hairy chest. He looked down on his infant girl and smiled as her tiny body lifted and lowered to the rhythm of his breaths. Soon the baby was sleeping soundly.

"I just don't get to see her enough," he said.

"I know, baby. But, you're going to spoil her."

"A little won't hurt anybody."

Frances sighed and smiled. Soon Wayne was snoring and she carefully removed the baby from his soft, rolling tummy and returned her to the baby bed.

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I don't actually remember sleeping on my father's stomach when I was a baby, but when my mother told me this story, suddenly so many of my sensory memories related to my father made sense. Until I was 10 or 11 my sister and I would, as we put it, wallow all over Daddy almost every night before we went to bed. We loved to lay our heads on Daddy's tummy and tell him about our day while Mother got ready for bed. Daddy's smell was, for me, clean and reassuring. It represented love and safety. He let us tickle his underarms and play "parking lot" in the receding portions of his hairline by pretending to park cars in the spaces on either side of his hair on his forehead. Even as I write this, I feel warmth, safety, and love. I smile and know this is one reason why I think my childhood was happy.

This ritual changed about the time I reached 12.

"Okay, girls. It's time for you to go to bed," Mother said.

"Oh, Mommy. Can't we sleep with you and Daddy?" I asked.

"Yeah, Mommy. Please. Please. Please," Regina said.

"No. You've each got your own beds."

"Ohhhhh," we whined together.

"Oh, let them lay here for a little bit," Daddy said. He hated for our evening ritual to end as much as we did.

"No, Wayne. They're getting too big. They can't be sleeping with us anymore."

Daddy didn't say anything else. And after that night, our "wallowing" times were fewer and farther apart, until they disappeared altogether. I still miss those wonderful innocent family times. But eventually someone opens the curtains and turns off the air conditioner and the reality of the world intrudes.

The relationship we have with our parents is often the first, and for most of us, one of the longest relationships we will experience. It has been suggested that we can't help bonding with our parents or those who provide primary care for us as infants. This

biological urge, according to attachment theory, allows us to develop emotional bonds with other significant individuals as we grow older (Bowlby, 1969; Servaty-Seib, 2004, April; Shaver & Tancredy, 2001). This early attachment is important because it affects how we will relate to others throughout our lives.

> The manner in which infants experience the relationship with their primary caregivers (e.g., dependable vs. undependable) will affect how they form, maintain, and relinquish later relationships (Bowlby, 1969; Stroebe, 2002). More specifically, each individual builds a working model of relationships between the self and others (Bowlby; Noppe, 2000; Shaver & Tancredy; Stroebe). (Servaty-Seib, 2004, April, para. 26)

The quality of a relationship influences how an individual will react and respond to the loss of a person (Meshot & Leitner, 1993; Muller & Thompson, 2003, July; S. S. Rubin, 1992). This makes sense because, for example, we respond differently to a coworker's death than to the death of a spouse or child. According to Muller and Thompson:

> The quality of the emotional attachment to the deceased acts as an additional variable in one's response to death. The nature of the bond influences the intensity of one's grief and one's adjustment to a loss (Levy, Martinkowski, & Derby, 1994; Meshot & Leitner; Moss, Resch, & Moss, 1997; S. S. Rubin). The role of the deceased, whether that of family scapegoat, hero, or main provider, has a notable effect on the grieving process. (p. 184)

Studies have also indicated that the more positive the relationship the more intense the grief reported (Bonanno, 1999; Moss, Resch, & Moss; Muller & Thompson).

It should be no surprise that the women who participated in this study could only tell the story of their loss in the context of relationship. Telling the story is often the beginning of how we make and find meaning in our loss. For it is in the very act of telling that we create not only our stories, but ourselves (Ramsey & Blieszner, 2000).

Narrative Process and the Self Construction of Meaning

Telling the stories of our loss does more than just convey information. Humans construct personal reality out of our individual and collective constructions, which grow out

of personal experience. Our personal narratives are the means or process whereby we construct meaning. It is proactive rather than passive, and it has a purpose (Arvay, 2001; Kelly, 1955). "Death stories are reiterated to affirm their central meaning in the life course of the bereaved person" (Romanoff, 2001, p. 254). It is through language and the social process of comparing and contrasting the details of our experiences with others that we are able to derive meaning and construct reality. According to Gonçalves (1997):

> It is in language that meaning is constructed… The hermeneutic and meaning nature of language results, above all, from the process by which words are combined with one another in the establishment of a narrative plot or matrix. It is within this narrative matrix that the individual proactively and creatively constructs a reality of meaning. (pp. xvi-xv)

Narrative is a way of knowing for the storyteller and the listener, or in the case of narrative research, the participant and the researcher (Arvay, 2001; Josselson, 1995; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Ochberg, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1991; H. J. Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Thus, telling our stories is by its very nature a social process. We tell stories every day. We can't help it.

> We spontaneously relate the events of our day to our loved ones when we return home from work or school, tell stories that we hope will impress or entertain our friends, and seek the compassion and counsel of others – including professionals – through sharing accounts of adversity. (Romanoff, 2001, p. 246)

Narrative is not just the story being told, it is also the process of telling, for it is in the interactive process of telling the story that the story and the language used to convey its details that meaning-making occurs illuminating and revealing our understanding of reality (Romanoff, 2001). I will begin with each woman's story of their relationship with their parents. It would be simplistic to group these stories by good relationships and bad relationships. The very nature of relationship implies give and take, ups and downs, good and bad. But I will start with those stories that the storyteller characterized as "good" and let each woman tell her story in her own words as much as possible.

The Women

Brenda

"… the perfect childhood."

Brenda and Charlotte are sisters. They are White, high school graduates, and married. Their father was a blue-collar worker and their mother helped with the family wrecking business. Brenda is the oldest. She is 57 years old. She has three adult children, two daughters and a son, and three grandchildren. She is the secretary for a middle school in a small southwestern town.

> I guess, to me, I've always felt like I had the perfect childhood. I mean I know I did. We didn't have any money. We didn't have any fancy house or nothing like that. But we were happy, you know, we had lots of relatives around all the time and our relatives were our social life. Mother and Daddy were... whatever we needed they would sacrifice to make sure we had it. We didn't ask for a lot because we knew we didn't have a lot. And we knew that if we asked for it they would make sure that we got it some way or the other. All of our family was close. It was fun visiting back and forth. Our grandparents on both sides were always a lot of fun. We had a real good time.
>
> I can't remember ever being unhappy. When I was a teenager I might not have been happy about something that they wouldn't let me do, but I can't remember ever being unhappy as a family. That was interesting to me, especially now that I look back or I see some of the families that my kids at school have and I think oh, if they'd just had that.
>
> As I got older I think I learned every year how much smarter they were than I thought they were, after I had kids especially. Mother and Daddy were always there, and they loved our kids. We lived close by and they were always there. They would pick them up after school. My kids really... were blessed that they had them. My sister lived off and so her

kids were younger and I don't think they really got the benefit of our parents as grandparents on a day-to-day basis.

Charlotte

"It was like being around your best friend all of your life."

Charlotte is 55 years old. She has an adult son and daughter, and one grandson. She works as a claims representative for a government agency in a medium-size southwestern city.

Mother and Daddy were always the most important people to Brenda and me. The happiest I can remember as a child was always when we were in the family unit. I always couldn't wait to get home as a child. I can still remember the school bus, as we got closer to home, every day being excited that I'm coming home. That was always the way I was. I was always pleased to be at home. I never wanted to go anyplace else. I never wanted to live anyplace else but with my parents. As a child I wouldn't even spend the night away from home. Even to go across the street or anything. I was probably in the second or third grade or older before I ever spent the night away from home. Even with my grandparents, Jonah and Sarah [uncle and aunt], or anybody. We once lived across the street from Jonah and Sarah for a long time. I would go home with them but as soon as it came bedtime I'd have to go back home.

They [my parents] were always my favorite people to be around. It was always a joy. I can't look back and remember any unhappy times as a child at all. It was always pleasant. I can remember sitting on the porch waiting for Daddy to get home from work and seeing his truck and getting really excited that he was almost home from work. I always had a pleasant childhood. I don't have any bad memories. Mother was always, next to Brenda, my best friend. I always felt real comfortable and secure. I can't remember any unhappy times as a child. There were bad times when we were growing up. I know there were. There was financial trouble. There were a lot of bad times. Goodness knows Daddy was not always

the most pleasant person. But I can't remember ever being unhappy or sad or anything as a child.

Mother was my best friend. I never felt it a chore, after I moved away from home, to go home. Daddy was always... I loved Daddy. I liked to be around him because he was always funny and making jokes and picking at us and stuff. I can remember, even after I moved away from home on my own, Daddy would be very angry at me for what he thought I was doing. It still did not keep me from going home. Even though I knew he would be mad when I got there it never bothered me. I still wanted to go home even if I thought he was going to be angry. He was always, when you pulled up in the driveway, thrilled to see you even if he was angry. He was just thrilled to see you. Daddy was always so softhearted. When you would leave to go home, I lived 30 miles away, Daddy would cry. When I got married and moved away, as soon as we came home, Daddy was always laughing and joking and it was always a pleasure to be around Daddy. I always knew that no matter what happened that he would be there to take care of me.

Mother was my best friend other than Brenda. She was my best friend and to sit and to spend time with my mother was probably the most enjoyable thing in my life. I liked to go home. I like to sit and talk to her. I liked to go shopping with her. It was like being around your best friend all your life.

Several of the women said their childhoods were happy, only to qualify this assertion with exceptions. I know I remember my childhood as a wonderful time. I really do feel like I am one of the luckiest and most blessed people in the world to have been born to my parents. I wouldn't want any other parents than the ones I had. But, life doesn't come with a guarantee, and too often, despite their best intentions, our parents weren't able to be the perfect safe haven we needed.

Greta

"It was just that general… clean your room kind of thing. I didn't know them."

Greta is 39 years old and White. She is a doctoral student and an elementary school teacher in a large southwestern city. She has been divorced twice and has two children from her first marriage. Her son and daughter are high school students. Her father pastored a large metropolitan church and her mother was a homemaker.

> As far as my relationship was, I think, ummm, I guess we didn't talk a lot. There was just that general kind of mom-dad relationship, clean your room kind of thing. My dad was gone a lot. He was the pastor of a very, very large church in [a large southwestern city]. So he spent, I would say, 90 percent of his life at church or at hospitals or things like that. My mom was a homemaker, but worked with my dad a lot. But as far as the church was concerned and the things that they did, I would say as far as knowing them in depth, no, I didn't know them.
>
> My mom was just a quiet person. Very, very intelligent. Smart. Very creative. But you know, like I said, it was just like knowing them on a general surface. If I ask people what they were like, people say they were kind, giving, do anything for you kind of people. But, in general, my relationship was pretty surface.
>
> I think I had a happy childhood. Like I said, what I remember the most is spending a lot of time at the church. My mom had a major in music and a minor in English, so I was involved in pageants and things like that. She enjoyed me doing that because I think that's things that she probably wanted to do, but didn't have the opportunity or whatever as a child. She missed out on a lot of things she would have pursued because she got married.
>
> I have an older brother. He had just turned 16 [when their parents were killed]. We had a pretty typical sister-brother kind of relationship. He was three years older, but there was a kind of rivalry, pick on, he was kind of in that stage of... He was rebellious. And I was always the one that would observe his rebellion, and I was always like I'm not going to do

that, and tried to have a "be the perfect child" kind of attitude. But, if we were stuck in the car together we'd play games. But it was kind of like a love-hate relationship. And he was at that age where he was a teenager and driving and had his own agenda and life. He rebelled against my mom and dad. I didn't know until later on he used to skip school and skip classes. Typical. Of course my son would be in really big trouble if he ever skipped school.

Most young girls are dependent upon their mothers as the primary caregiver in the family (Chodorow, 1978; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Each of the women interviewed gave more importance to their relationship with one parent over the other, regardless of the quality of the relationship with the second parent. However, not all of the women interviewed related to their mother as the primary caregiver.

Fran

"I didn't have a relationship with my mom when my dad died."

Fran, 45, is White. She has a bachelor's degree and is married. She has a daughter in college and a son who is a high school senior. She works as a payroll manager for a hospital located in a medium-size southwestern town. Both of her parents worked. Her father was a music minister in their church.

When I was a child Dad was my parent. I know Mother was my mom, but if I needed to know something my dad told me. My dad told me about my periods. My dad told me about my first bra. In fact, his mother brought some training bras down from my cousins. Dad, Grandma, and I did this. If I needed something, I went to my dad. He was my parent, not that Mother wasn't, but I just had a really close bond with my dad.

I can remember sitting for hours at his feet talking about the Bible, you know, explaining different passages or something. He was music minister in the church. I would ride with my dad and go early and my sister would go with my mother and go late. So I was

just always with my dad. Our relationship was really close. He talked me through being saved, in the bathtub. (Laughter.) At 8 years old you don't care if your dad is sitting on the toilet talking to you, you know. So, my relationship with my dad was very close.

By the time I was a teenager there was probably a little rebellion there. You know, I didn't think Dad knew what he was talking about. He hadn't been there. He hadn't dated. We were still real close. I still respected him, but there was a little rebellion. But still close. Then after he had the stroke, it's kind of like it just wiped the rebellion away. I went back to whatever you want Dad, whatever you say, you know. That type of deal. So, overall we had a really good relationship.

He'd been my primary person and I really had a loss. And I know this will probably come up later, but I didn't know my mother. I didn't have a relationship with my mother when my dad died. I don't say that to belittle my mother, because I love my mother, but I didn't know my mother. We were just almost like strangers in a way, because I went to Daddy. Daddy's the one I went to when I had problems. He's the one I asked questions about this and that. So, you know… I just felt like I didn't know my mother.

I didn't dislove her. It kind of maybe sounds as if I didn't love her as a child. I just, I don't know… When she had me, Dad made the comment one time that Mom didn't really want kids. He was the one that wanted kids. So, he just took over the care for me when I was little, you know. So, that's kind of how we grew up. Then when they had my sister, there was five years difference between us, and I guess I was five, so my dad took care of me and Mom took care of the baby. So, Mom just naturally took care of Helen. I took more after my Dad – long, skinny, tall. My little sister took more after my mom – short, plump. We just both took after the other just in genetics, I guess. You know, I loved my mom to death, but I didn't feel that closeness to her until after my dad died. So I had four and a half, five years in between there that I felt like I got to know my mom. I felt like we got closer. Now we did stuff. I sewed. She sewed. So, we sewed together. We cooked. She taught me to cook. We

did stuff growing up, more as teenagers than young kids. But there still wasn't that bond that my dad and I had.

As a young adult I think it [the relationship with Mom] was good. I think it was good. We talked probably every day, every other day. We had become really close by then. The last year though, Mother, I look back now, there was a jealousy there, not of me and Kevin [Fran's husband], but a jealousy; she was missing Dad. I look back and see maybe that the five years [after Dad died and before her death] she grieved Dad more than we realized. And I would've done things differently if I'd realized that. But I was so young at the time I didn't know what to look for. So I kind of resented talking to her sometimes, because every time I'd say we're going to go do so-and-so, she wanted to go or "I never got to do that." So, I felt a jealousy there, but I think it was just a longing to be with family. Because that last year my sister was also away for her first year of college. So my mother was home by herself that last year. We were still close; we just didn't talk as much that last year due to that. [Losing a spouse is different from losing a parent] and I don't know that until it happens and I still haven't lost a spouse, but I think I could relate better now than I could've then.

Now I see things… Oh, there's so many times I wish I could say, "Mom, you were right. I'm so sorry I gave you grief on this." Because now I see what they were trying to tell me about things. I see why they said no to this, because I'm a parent now. I want to tell my kids no. I want them to learn from my experiences just like my parents were trying to get me to learn from theirs. I thought they were old fuddy-duddies. They didn't know. They'd never been on dates. They'd never had a curfew. Well, they did, too. It was just a different time. My kids, the same thing. It was a different era when I was a kid to them, but it's still the same thing. Still the same principle. Still the same… good kids aren't out after midnight type of thing. But I didn't think my parents knew what they were talking about. Now my kids don't think I know what I'm talking about. They [my parents] got smarter. So there's so

many times I've wished I could tell my mom and dad, "Oh, I'm so sorry for doing that to you" or "You were right."

I had a real good childhood. I can't think of anything negative at all. I had real good memories. A little too strict, as I got to be a teenager. But I look back and Dad knew what he'd done as a teenager. I don't know all the stories of my dad as a teenager, but I know my dad was a little wild. Going to church wasn't as pushed on them as it was us. My grandfather didn't go. My grandmother went to Assembly of God. So Dad didn't go. I know Dad had a wreck when he was 16 and broke both of his arms because he was drinking. So he knew what could happen. So, therefore, I think he was too strict on me. Well, I got to see both sides of that, so I tried to temper it with my kids and I think it's worked out. You know, I think I have good kids and I get told that all the time so I don't feel like it's just me. (Laughter.)

Fran was 18 and 23, respectively, when her father and mother died. She married Kevin a year and a half before her mother's death. Fran became very close to her mother-in-law, Marian, after losing her mother. Marian died two and a half years ago. This was a significant loss for Fran.

Marian's death was hard. Probably even hardest of all. Not that I loved her any more than my parents, but when they left I was married to Kevin, had been for a year and a half, so they were already my in-laws. We went through a rocky period when my daughter was born two and a half years later because I didn't have a mom to come cuddle the baby and ooh and aah and stay with me. My grandmother came down and stayed a week, but Grandma didn't quite get it. (Laughter.) She wanted to take care of the baby, not me and I needed someone to take care of me, too. Marian and I went through a really rocky period at that point, but once we passed that period, it was like, oh man, we became really good friends. Her daughter didn't live here, so I think I became her daughter and she became my mom. Now Wallace [father-in-law] is the same way, but I didn't get as close to him as I did

> my dad. Probably I'm as close to him as most girls are their real dads. But it was different from my dad because I was so close to my dad. But, Marian was my world. They became my parents. And I don't want to say I forgot my parents, because I don't want to disrespect, but in a way I kind of did. I just forgot that I lost my parents because they just filled the gap. They filled the opening, the void there. So when she died it really, really upset me and I didn't realize how much until not too long ago. I didn't realize that everything I was going through was a result of losing her.

Some of the women in this study described the relationship with one of their parents as poor or distant. Evelyn said she felt as though she lost her father years before his actual death even though she saw him often. Kerr (1994), in her study of the meanings women attach to the loss of their parents, found that the participants who had negative parent-child relationships experienced anticipatory grief for the relationship that could have been more than for the actual death of that parent.

> Anticipatory grief, as these respondents characterized it, did not mean grieving immediately prior to a parent's death. Most in this group indicated they had grieved as young adults for the kind of parent they wished they had had. If these respondents grieved at all after the parent's death, they grieved more for a kind of relationship that they perceived had never existed for the relationship that was lost through death. (p. 354)

Often just remembering the good times helps the survivors (Muller & Thompson, 2003, July). All of the women in this study said they were glad they had shared their stories. For me, it's necessary to remember the happy times in order to understand the periods that were hard.

Evelyn

"Mother was everything. She was the center of my universe."

Evelyn is a 57-year-old White, college professor at a southwestern regional university. She holds a doctoral degree. She is married and the mother of two adult daughters. She has one grandson. Her father was a farmer and her mother was a homemaker.

> Mother was everything. She was the center of my universe. I have 8 brothers and a sister. I'm number 9. She was a disciplinarian, but very sweet and loving and kind and gentle. That's what I remember about her. Always, even when I was very little, there was no place like Mother's lap.
>
> When I reached my teens I was probably a little rebellious and she handled me with kid gloves. She never clamped down on me, was mean to me, or told me I was silly or any of that. She would just talk to me, and try to reason with me, really was kind and gentle. She should've locked me in a closet. (Laughter)
>
> I didn't have her long as a young adult, but she was very supportive. I got married very young and she didn't really want me to, but wasn't willing to stop me from doing it. After I was married she was just very supportive. She wanted me to finish college. That was very important to her. She facilitated that by paying my tuition all the time I was in college. I had to go to Europe with my husband in the military. She just packed my bags because she thought that's where I needed to be. She thought it was an opportunity. She facilitated that for me also when she could have screamed and yelled that her baby was going off to another world. She simply thought that's what had to be done and she helped me realize that. In everything I did she was there saying that's a good thing. She didn't always understand what we did, but she always supported what we did.
>
> When I was little, my relationship with my father was distant. He was always working. Now in early childhood I was his princess. (Laughter) He'd come home from work

and I'd spend a lot of time in his lap. I was very much a little frilly girl and he'd not had one of those, so he thought it was fun.

As I got older he was more distant. As a teenager, he couldn't take my rebellion. He didn't like it. I was always scared of him. He never spanked me. He could talk to me and make me a puddle on the floor. So, I think as a teenager, more distant. And as an adult more distant also because my mother died, and he remarried. And after that, really, a very distant relationship.

Even though I was not close to my father, he was always home waiting on me. And when I came home, he was always thrilled I was there. I was actually the one who could get him to do things when no one else could. He would not buck me on anything. And I don't know why that was true. Maybe it was because I wasn't there a lot and the ones that were there a lot, he could tell them no. He would never tell me no. I got him to do things that other people couldn't get him to do.

When I directed "The Wizard of Oz" and my nephew was the scarecrow, I asked my dad to come. He never saw anything that I've done on stage. Never. So I thought my nephew's in it, I'm directing it, it's not an opera, it's just a little old show, and he didn't come to it. But I thought my mother would've been there and she would've been on the front row. She would've been beaming from ear to ear that her grandchild was on stage and her daughter was directing and had costumed that show. It would've been such an amazing moment for her to have seen that.

I feel like I lost my father when I was 28. I did not lose my father when he was 93. I lost my father after my mother died. I did what the Bible says. I honored my father. I respected my father. I paid homage to my father all those years. But I felt like he was gone. He took little interest in my children. I think as he aged, and I think we all do this as we age, we become self-centered again as children, and he did that. The only time that he was particularly interested was if it brought honor to him. But I honestly feel like I lost him

shortly after I lost my mother. And he was really very active until he was in his late 80s, I mean until he was 87… he had the farm until he was in his 80s. He was still hauling hay and doing all those things. So it's not that he was incapable of doing it [attending events that were important to Evelyn]. He made the choice of not doing it. It was outside his comfort zone and outside his realm of understanding. If it had been sports, he would've been there. That was his realm of understanding. Since I was theatre and performance, he had no understanding of that. And it was not something that he saw of particular significance. My mother would've seen it as significant because it would've been creative. He did not share that.

I guess I ignored it [his lack of support] because I had other significant people in my life who confirmed for me. I have siblings who, yes they think I'm eccentric, but they also appreciate the fact of who and what I am and were very encouraging. I also have in-laws who think that what I do is very valuable and they confirmed that for me. So, [I dealt with it] probably by becoming much more involved in my husband's family, and allowing them to be the parents.

Sometimes I act like him. Sometimes I see in me more of him than I do my mother. He was very straightforward and, as you know, I tend to be very straightforward. My mother was very much a diplomat, which I can be that, but I think it's more in my nature to be very straightforward. He was very demanding, and I think I can be very demanding also. And I don't particularly like it when I realize that that's it. But I also think he was a very brilliant man. So, I think part of my intelligence, I think certainly my mother was, but I think also he was.

I've been frustrated as an adult because I would do something or I would be given an award, and I would think, "Oh, Daddy will be so pleased." That frustrated me because after a while I realized what I was doing was trying to please my father. Still trying to please my father, even as a 40-year-old adult I was still trying to please my father. I probably didn't

tell him things intentionally because I thought that's so stupid at this age to try to please your father. But I think I always did. And still, I think sometimes, "Well, Daddy would've gotten a kick out of that." Because it was important to him. Our name was important and that we be respected. That was very important. That we be people who were respected. It confirmed for him his self-worth by the things that we did.

To a certain extent it [education] was very important to him. My dad was not an educated person at all. He only went to the third or fourth grade because he had to work. He actually went into the fields at that point in his life. But he was a very bright man. He read two newspapers every day. He knew exactly what bills were being passed in the legislature every session, which I don't know. He kept up with current events. He was very bright and I think he saw the worth of education at a certain point. Probably he would've thought I was crazy for all that I did. (Laughter) Certainly he saw the necessity of it.

His goal was for all of us to graduate from the same high school, because he had been a sharecropper, the son of a sharecropper, and they had moved and moved and moved. So, his goal when he and my mother got married, very young, was that all of his children would go to the same school and graduate from the same school. And we did. And to own his own farm, which he did, which is an accomplishment beyond belief. Amazing for anyone who was a sharecropper to be able even to buy land, let alone a lot of land, and to raise children and to send them to the same school. Now granted, it was a little tiny country school. I'm not sure how much it was worth (laughter), but all of us went there and he was very proud of that fact. I suppose that all of the time we were in school he was on the school board making sure that it functioned well. He was also very respected. He was one of those go-to men in the community. When someone had a problem they came and talked to him about it. He was respected as an intelligent man.

I think we need to talk about my mother-in-law. She was very much [like a surrogate mother]. …She was very much into what I was doing. Always very encouraging. I could not

have worked the way I worked without her, because if the kids got sick or something she could be there in a few minutes, and she did often. She really helped me raise them. She was very significant in my life.

Dorothy

"But when he was drinking he was just a different person. He was abusive…"

Dorothy is a 55-year-old, African American, doctoral student. She is divorced and the mother of 2 adult sons. She works as a donations scheduler for a non-profit organization in a large southwestern city. She is from a working-class family. Her father worked as a porter for a car dealership and her mother was a homemaker.

I'm going to start with my father. My father was a good worker. He would go to work. I remember in the winter he would come home and his hands would be… he was a porter on a car lot… his hands would be blistered, cracked, because he had been out there in the cold without gloves, because with some of the work gloves got in his way. Even when he was sick he'd go to work.

I think we had sort of a relationship that depended on if he was sober or not. There was a different relationship for when he was sober. When he was sober he was the ideal father. We got along very well and he was just great. Very quiet. But when he was drinking he was just a different person. He was abusive and I didn't like him very well.

My mother was different. I just loved my mother. I always worried about, especially while she was ill, and the closer she got to her own death, how I would survive. I would tell people that I don't know how I would survive with my mother gone. But I did. And it was really weird because I loved her but there was some resentment there because she allowed my father to be abusive. I felt like she should have been a stronger person for herself and for me. So I kind of felt like I was the adult and she was the child as far as when he became abusive because I defended and took up for her. She was never my defender because she never defended me. She totally ignored his abusiveness. But then I understand

she was just a weak person. There are plenty of women that I've seen over the years like that. They're just so dependent upon a man that they would just sacrifice anything just to have a man. She was just weak like that. I've come to realize that and that helped a lot.

When I finished high school I left home and went and stayed with my other mother, my other family, until I turned 18 because I was 17. I rebelled because I wanted to get away from them. Of course I wasn't going to go to college, because I felt like going to college at that time would keep me tied to them and I had to get away from them, you know. I think, too, I always wanted to go, but I just stubbornly refused to go when I had the opportunity with them.

My parents never let me go. My father would call two or three times in a week, especially toward the weekend, because between my parents and their [her sons'] father the weekend was taken. They'd start calling, on Friday especially, wanting me to bring my sons, and I wouldn't take them until Saturday. Then they'd have to come back Sundays. They were always calling for something. My father, when he was drinking, just to bug me I thought. But he was probably just, I don't know…

My parents were older when I was born. It made a big difference. It made me understand why my father would say some of the things he said. He was afraid of knowledge and intelligence. He used to make some tacky remarks about knowing too much and thinking I knew everything. And I'm wondering now if my father could even read. I look back and he never read the newspaper. My mother did. My mother would read everything. And then I wonder if the reason it took her so long… she could read a newspaper for hours… was because she read slowly. And because she read everything, I think she was just so grateful she could read. She would even read the want ads. She would ask me, "Did you see this in the paper?" I'm one of these scanners, and she would say, "Well, you don't read the paper, do you." My mother would say funny things like that. I remember one day, she was a funny person, she asked me, she said, "Do you look at yourself in the mirror during

the day?" I said, "No." This was at the end of the day. She had watched me walk around the house with this spot, something white on my face, all day. (Laughter) She let me go all day with that on my face, and then she asked me, "Do you look at yourself …." (Laughter)

After my father died, I became closer to my mother because I had to live with her. That was strange. I didn't realize, you know you look back now and you kind of make sense of why you were doing some of the things you did. I didn't realize at the time that I was really rebelling because I had to give up my life, my home, to move back with my mother because she was just totally helpless. I became the person in charge of everything. My mother wouldn't go to the bank. She wouldn't go grocery shopping. She wouldn't go to the pharmacy to get her medicines. She could never learn to drive a car. I was left in charge and with all the decision-making. All the decisions had to be made by me.

For a year before she died I actually went to counseling to help me deal with that because I was having all these feelings of love and hate. I loved her and I hated her. I hated her because, 1) she never told me she loved me and 2) she never defended me and ignored my father's abuse. I was just, didn't understand, you know. I'm saying I felt guilty because I felt like I should've been sad and everything but I was hating her and I didn't like that and, so I went to counseling. That helped tremendously. I would recommend that for anybody. I went for a year.

When she passed away it was terrible. She was gone. I dreamed about my mother quite often for a number of years. And I still dream about her but now not as much. It seems like certain times, if I'm really down. I won't say down because I don't get that way. If I really, maybe, just need some comfort or something, then I dream about my mother.

Angela

"It was like living with an alcoholic."

Angela is 52 years old and White. She holds a Ph.D. in education and is provost at a southwestern two-year state college. She has been divorced and is now married. She has two

adult daughters from her first marriage. Her father worked for a large corporation and her mother was a homemaker until her husband's death. She was then forced to work outside the home.

> My relationship with my father was conflicted. I just adored him. I worshiped him. I wanted to be just like him. I identified with him. I did not want to grow up to be like my mother and have to take care of children and not have a career, being somebody's secretary. I always wanted to be like my dad, to be the person who made the decisions and who was responsible, who went out into the world and achieved success and people liked and did things. But at the same time, the polio and I think his own upbringing weren't a good combination. He was trying to pretend like there was nothing the matter with him when he was in tremendous, tremendous pain all of the time. People didn't treat handicapped people well in those days. He probably should have been in a wheelchair.
>
> He always walked; the most he ever did was when his hip calcified to the point that his joint came out of the socket. The ball of his femur came out of his hip socket. He got one of the first replacement metal hips, which may have been the cause of his heart attack. There's great likelihood that his body reacted with a blood clot and that's what caused the heart attack. So he started drinking. He would be cool at work all day and demonstrate that there was nothing the matter and then come home and take it out on all of us. I was the oldest and I got the brunt of it. My brother was 11 months younger. The two of us took a lot of the temper tantrums. So, it was a conflicted relationship.
>
> [Losing my dad when I was 16] means that all the things that I had to work out about that relationship I had to work out so slowly. My relationships with people in authority have not been good because I had that fear relationship with him. It has taken me an awfully long time to get that in balance and understand the dynamics of what was happening.

He was the important person in the house and everything revolved around him and our lives revolved around him. When he walked in the door we had to judge whether he was in a good mood or a bad mood. It was as if we were living with an alcoholic. We never knew what to expect and so we were always wary, trying to ascertain what his mood is and what's going to happen and what the right thing to say is. And sometimes there is no right thing to say. What I was learning to do was to evade him and be gone but at the same time I was doing everything... I didn't know this then, but I know this now, every activity I was involved in, everything I was trying to do, and I belonged to a lot of things at school. I was in band; he was in band. He wanted me to be in speech; I was in speech. He thought I had a flair for drama; I was in drama, I was the lead in the class play. I competed in speech tournaments. He liked science. He wanted to be a doctor. He thought that it would be nice if I were a doctor. My mother wanted me to be a teacher. I took science classes. When I started college I majored in pharmacy and biochemistry.

It took me a long time to work out the relationship with my mother. We both worked hard at it but we didn't have a language for it. I lost my mother two years ago. I'm really fond of my mother and I finally realized how much she loved me. She just didn't know how to tell me in a way that was important to me. I wanted her to do that and I needed her approval. I went back to college. She was one of the critical factors that tipped me into going back because she embarrassed me to one of my dad's teachers who was also my teacher.

I was up there visiting her after I had been divorced, with two kids that I was supporting. I think I was managing editor of a newspaper. I was doing well. I went up to visit her. In front of a store, in the parking lot, we ran into this teacher who had been my dad's algebra teacher and an inspiration for him and the family. As little kids we had gone to his farm fishing and I had him for college algebra and was always compared to my dad. My dad got As; I got Bs. She said, "You remember my daughter don't you? She's the only one

of the four that didn't finish college." And she wasn't trying to put me down; she was saying it because she wanted him to know she had succeeded in raising her children. It was important to her to have his approval. But what I heard was she's the only one who didn't finish college. But I thought, oh boy, I really need to get that done. It was one of the key things that did trigger me to go and finish. I ended up at a two-year school where she and he had gotten associate degrees. Which led to all the rest of it. I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for that. That was really an important expectation that she had.

She had better understanding of what I would be good at and what I was really like and tried to find a way to tell me, but she didn't have a good way of being able to do that. But we got there anyway. She was a wonderful, wonderful person and I came to appreciate her more and understand what she was doing for me, how apprehensive she was in her own communications skills. For her to do the things that she did, she was very intense. She was intimidated by people. She was a shy person. It wasn't easy for her to put herself in front of others. She made herself go back to school. She made herself go into the work world. She made herself find a way to adequately support her children. She made herself deal with builders, car mechanics, and all those things that she would have preferred to have not done. She was a courageous woman and I'm really pleased that I came to know that and she knew that I know that.

Our relationship with our parents influences how we relate to others and how we respond to the losses that inevitably affect our lives. We may find our parents are a source of support or additional stress during those times. I am fortunate that my parents were living when my first husband died at the age of 38 from colon cancer. I was only 32 years old when my assumptions about life were shattered after three brief years of marriage. This loss was the beginning of my own search for meaning and the journey has been rooted in the relationship between my parents and me.

Marsha - 1984

I sat on the edge of the hospital bed and stared into my husband's face. Maybe this was it. Then I thought I shouldn't just assume David's breathing difficulty was just to be expected. It might be caused by the morphine. I called for Nurse Carol. She came quickly and checked everything. She assured me this was to be expected. She could get oxygen to help David breathe easier.

She walked with me out of the room and quietly said this was the beginning of his death. Carol said David probably knew he was dying. I believe his agitation was fear that I didn't know what was happening. I quickly went back to David's side. I knew I must help him, reassure him and make it easy for him.

Mother and I lowered the head of the bed and moved David over to the right. I climbed up on the bed and put my right arm around his head. Mother helped David put his left arm around my waist and I held his left hand in my left hand. We stayed there a moment. David's breathing was difficult, so I had Mother raise us up a little. Then I lifted my eyes and began to pray with David. As I finished he let out a long breath and relaxed on my shoulder. Then he exhaled once more and completely relaxed. I knew he was gone.

I asked to be left alone with David's body to pack up the room. I needed to do this alone. To me it was like closing a chapter. I had brought my David in on Monday afternoon and unpacked everything and now, six days later, we were leaving and I must put it all away.

The hospital staff let me load all our belongings on a gurney. An orderly pushed it and followed us down the hospital corridor. Mother and Daddy flanked me and guided me onto the elevator. Somehow we made it to Daddy's car and got everything inside. The ride to their house must've taken the usual 30 minutes, but I was unaware of the trip until Daddy opened the rear car door for me to get out and go inside. The night was clear and bright. I looked up. The moon was full and round. The stars sparkled in the dark blue sky. I smiled. Somehow it seemed important to know the moon was full and shining on us.

I managed to put on my gown and wash my face. I stood in the doorway of my parents' bedroom, reluctant to leave. Daddy was sitting on his side of the bed. Their faces reflected the pain they felt – pain for the loss of David – pain for my broken heart – pain they could not repair. I turned to go to my old bedroom. Mother stopped me and held me in her arms.

"Wait," Daddy said. "Come lie here between us."

"Yes," Mother said. "You lie down right here.

I crawled across the king-size bed to the middle and lay down. Daddy lay on my right and Mother on my left. She drew the covers up over me.

"I'll just stay for a little while."

"Don't you worry about anything," Daddy said.

"It's all right," Mother said. "You just sleep here tonight."

And I did. I was again in the warm, cocoon of my parents' love and protection. Sometimes you can close the curtains, turn on the air conditioner, and escape the reality of the world, even if it's just for one brief night.

The Other Side of Attachment

Love and attachment, or lack thereof, compose the soul of our relationships – for good or bad. The attachment and bereavement form a dichotomy in the context of relationship. Raphael and Dobson (2000) view this dichotomy as part of the social nature of society.

> Ultimately, grief and bereavement are a testimony to human love and attachment – the former only occurs because of the latter. These bonds, and the pain of separation are seen to be essential to the social nature of society (e.g., Averill, 1968) and without them there would be little human growth, or social development. Bereavement is the other side of attachment – and both contribute to the social capital. (p. 58)

Bereavement will change our lives. Regardless of the quality of the relationship with our parents, they are no longer physically present in our lives. We are faced with the task of figuring out what our lives will be like without them, who we are now, and what it all means.

CHAPTER THREE – STORIES OF LOSS

Realizing They are Gone

Marsha, 1995

Mother never had the luxury of grieving after Daddy died. Fighting cancer took all of her focus and energy. She refused to complain or give up. Ten years earlier, my first husband, David, died from cancer. David and Mother had developed a special relationship, and she loved him like a son. He was her example and hero as she confronted her own cancer. Mother tried every option offered her, but none of the cancer treatments worked. She never had a period of strength and recovery. Daddy died July 26, 1994, and by November 1995 it was clear Mother was dying. Nothing else could be done to stop the cancer. Radiation to reduce the pain from a tumor along her spine and blood transfusions to boost her energy were all that remained.

My husband and I flew to Texas to be with Mother and her extended family to celebrate Thanksgiving. We always gather at my cousin's home for a reunion each year. Mother was excited about seeing everyone. She had worked hard to organize our collection of family photos. I think she knew this would be her last time with her mother, brothers, and sisters. When we arrived in Texas on Tuesday Mother was in the hospital receiving a blood transfusion. The doctor thought she should stay for a few days. My sister and I begged the doctor to release her. After a little hesitation, he agreed to release her on Wednesday.

Mother spent Thanksgiving sharing memories with her family as they laughed and looked at the familiar photos. Sitting at the dining table, wearing a black wig, Mother laughed as she pointed out another picture to her sisters and brothers. By the end of the day, she was tired, but satisfied as my brother-in-law drove us home. Reluctantly, I returned to Virginia.

Two weeks before Christmas, Regina called to tell me it was time to come home. Thankfully, my boss at the YMCA where I worked as an executive assistant made the trip easier. He told me to stay as long as I needed. He had lost his mother to cancer a couple of years earlier. I had no idea how long I would be gone.

Mother was living with my sister. The hospice nurse, Lydia, thought Mother would die before the end of the week. But death is funny. It takes its own time. Mother refused to quit. Regina had placed a baby monitor next to Mother's bed so we could hear if she needed anything. Even in her weakened condition she kept trying to get out of bed.

"If I don't get up, I'll never get well," Mother said.

"Mother, you've got to stay in bed," Regina said.

"No."

"Mother, you're not strong enough to walk, and if you fall we can't pick you up," I said.

"But, I've got to get up."

Regina and I looked at each other. "Okay, we'll help you sit in the chair," I said, "but you've got to let us lift you together."

She tried to eat, but nothing tasted right. Finally, she quit eating and gradually stopped trying to climb out of bed. Two weeks after I arrived, Lydia brought an infusion pump and began a morphine IV for Mother. The pump was designed so the patient could self-administer extra medication, or bolus doses, as needed to control pain. Regina and I began alternating sleeping next to Mother in the blue recliner Daddy had bought for her just before he died.

Christmas day arrived. Regina, Will, my nephews, and I tried to have Christmas morning. We opened presents, but it was difficult knowing Mother was just down the hall dying. When we were done, the only presents under the tree belonged to her. But she was slipping farther away.

January 4 it was my turn to spend the night next to Mother. Curled up in the recliner, I held her left hand all night long. She never released her grip. Every time she moaned, I gave her a bolus dose of morphine. She would settle down and seemed to rest easier. By morning I was exhausted. When Lydia and the hospice aide arrived, I moved to my sister's room and slept.

A couple of hours later, I bathed and dressed and returned to be with Mother. Her breathing was rough and her eyes were closed. She could hear us, but was disconnecting from her surroundings. Regina and I wanted to make it easier for her to go. I found a Bible and read the passage about Jesus preparing many rooms in Heaven for his followers. Regina took a break, and I found myself alone with Mother. She drew in a raspy breath. It seemed as though she held her breath for a couple of beats and then pushed the air out of her lungs. The time between exhaling and drawing the next breath grew longer with each exhalation. But just as I thought she wouldn't inhale, she would gasp for air.

Suddenly she opened her eyes and looked directly into my eyes. She was alert and determined.

"I see David," she said. She fell back into her semi-conscious state and never spoke again.

Lydia came in to check on her. I joined Regina in the living room. A few minutes later Lydia quietly joined us.

"Your mother is still on oxygen," she said. "I think that's the only thing that's keeping her here."

Regina and I immediately got up and walked down the hall to the closet where the oxygen pump whirred. Without discussion or hesitation, we jointly flipped the switch on the machine to the off position. We went into Mother's room and stood next to her bed. Within the hour Mother drew her last breath. We had become so accustomed to the delay between each breath that we stood there for several minutes expecting her to re-animate and suck in another breath. But this time it was her last. She was gone.

Circumstances of Loss

The manner of death can affect how we react to loss (Muller & Thompson, 2003, July). In this study we see a variety of causes – brain tumor, assorted cancers, blood clot,

heart attacks, stroke, pulmonary embolism, old age, and murder – which have one result: the death of a parent. Sometimes the cause of death was natural and the family knew death was inevitable. Researchers classify this type of death as natural anticipated. Some deaths were from natural causes, but no one knew death was a possible result or that death was imminent. Such deaths are classified as natural unanticipated. Accidental death, suicide, and homicide comprise the remaining categories (Muller & Thompson, 2003, July; Range, Walston, & Pollard, 1992; Silverman, Range, & Overholser, 1994). While none of the participants' parents died from accident or suicide, one participant's parents were murdered.

There is research that supports the premise that the type of death affects how we move through the experience of grief and bereavement (Drenovsky, 1994; Ginzburg, Geron, & Solomon, 2002; Levy, Martinkowski, & Derby, 1994; Muller & Thompson, 2003, July; Silverman, Range, & Overholser, 1994). However, Muller and Thompson (2003) note there are other studies that show type of death isn't related to grief recovery (Campbell, Swank, & Vincent, 1991). There are many variables that may influence how a particular individual will react toward death loss. Duration of grief (Levy, Martinkowski, & Derby, 1994), talking or not talking about the loss (Lindemann, 1944; Worden, 1982), off-time losses (McGoldrick & Walsh, 1991), relationship to the deceased (Bonanno, 1999; Levy, Martinkowski, & Derby, 1994; Meshot & Leitner, 1993; Moss, Resch, & Moss, 1997; Muller & Thompson, 2003, July; S. S. Rubin, 1992), as well as the manner of death, will affect how a person will respond. Neimeyer and Anderson (2002) connect these variables to the larger context of meaning-making and the narrative processes.

> …we have found it useful to focus here on the *context* of the search for meaning – whether regarding the loss *per se*, the hidden benefits or life lessons learned, or one's resulting sense of self – and the *narrative processes* used to formulate one's account of these transitions. Thus, *how* one tells the tale can be contrasted with *what* one focuses upon, and both of these factors are distinguishable from the nearly inexhaustibly varied *content* of people's meanings regarding loss, the specific interpretations they

> place on it as a function of their personal positioning in broader cultural discourses shaped by gender, culture, age, relationship to the deceased, mode of death, and so on. (p. 47)

Narratives of Loss

The women who participated in this study shared their experiences in great detail. How these women relate their personal stories of loss and what they focus on is important. Each story is unique, but there are shared elements among the experiences of these women.

Some of the deaths could be described as premature or "off-time." The parent died much too soon as measured by age or the expectations of society. McGoldrick and Walsh (1991) note that under such circumstances "prolonged mourning, often lasting many years, is common. Families struggle to find some justification for the loss" (p. 31). Greta, Angela, Fran, and Evelyn experienced the loss of at least one parent "off-time."

Types of Narrative

External Narratives

The women in this study told the story of the loss of their parents in great detail. Most of them remembered not only the date and circumstances of a parent's death, but details surrounding the event itself, or if they were not present, the details surrounding the moment they learned of the death. Narratives that relate concrete details surrounding an event are called external narratives. Such narratives often tell the details of the event in sequence and may sound objective, however it is the storyteller who decides what to include in the narrative. What we choose to include is directly related to what we believe is important or meaningful (Neimeyer, 2001a; Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002). Analysis of what is included can reveal themes that are important to the storyteller, themes that she may be trying to work through and find meaning.

Internal Narratives

Internal narratives are just that, internal. The storyteller focuses on her feelings, attitudes, experiences, and response to the events that occurred. Internal narratives are subjective and feature themes that are important to the storyteller. These themes recur throughout the narrative. The women in this study repeated statements about the effect of their loss throughout the interviews, often in response to questions that on the surface had little to do with the repeated statement. The comments made by these women referred, as noted by Neimeyer and Anderson (2002), "…directly to the keen pain, sadness, longing and despair that accompany the death of a loved one, and especially to those emotional reactions that are most in need of recognition and understanding by self and others" (p. 53).

Reflexive Narratives

External and internal narratives may lead the storyteller to reflection. This process of reflecting, analyzing, interpreting, and making meaning is reflexive narrative.

> They [reflexive narrative processes] thus constitute a form of reflection upon the content of the other two narrative processes in a way that facilitates our further contemplating, evaluating and planning our responses to them. Bereaved persons engage in reflexive processing of their stories of loss when they struggle with "what it all means," as described in terms of our discussion of sense-making, benefit-finding and identity reconstruction. (Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002, p. 53)

As the women in this study related their stories of loss they moved freely between external, internal, and reflexive narratives. This is consistent with Neimeyer and Anderson's observations.

> Tacking back and forth between these modes of "storying" the loss helps make it more intelligible to the bereaved themselves, and more communicable to others. In general, we suspect that unconstrained grief narratives tend to shift from an early engagement with factual descriptions and associated emotions to personal, philosophical and spiritual significance over time, suggesting a helpful pattern of questioning for the practitioner. (p. 62)

They have not completed the reflexive process, although most of the women have achieved some degree of making sense out of their loss, finding some type of benefit in their loss, and identity reconstruction. Even though Dorothy expressed that she thinks she's completed her bereavement process with regard to her father, the reflexive nature of narrative implies that our stories and what they mean to us will change over time and with each re-telling (Romanoff, 2001).

Greta

"And then we were all shot."

Greta was the only 13 when her parents died. Two men murdered her parents during a home invasion. Her 16-year-old brother was bound and shot. Greta was raped and shot twice. Her mother was 37 and her father was 44. Not only was Greta's loss "off-time," but also the loss was complicated by the physical trauma she experienced and her young age. Even when children lose only one parent, they often experience problems throughout life (Furman, 1974; Osterweis, Solomon, & Green, 1984). Problems may include "illness, depression, and other emotional disturbances in subsequent adult life. They may later experience difficulty in forming intimate attachments and may carry catastrophic fears of separation and abandonment" (McGoldrick & Walsh, 1991, p. 39).

> Men came in with the intent of using the phone and their intentions were robbery. We were tied. Actually I was not tied at the time. My parents were tied and my brother was tied. I was led through the house to look for money or whatever that we had hidden. I was raped by both men and then they tied me up with my family. And then we were all shot. My mom was shot once. My brother was shot once. My dad and I were both shot twice. My parents didn't make it at all. And my brother and I were able to… Somehow I got us loose and I got us cut out and to the hospital.

Greta said she knew her mother did not survive the attack. No one wanted to tell her that her parents were dead, yet she felt she needed to know the truth in order to take care of herself.

> You know, I knew my mom was [dead]. She had gotten shot at closer range. I had heard her vomiting and knew that she had to be vomiting blood. And my brother had basically untied her with his teeth and her feet had fallen to the ground. Later I found out that they had partially choked my dad with something, but he was still, he was just lying there. They never said anything. My brother and I were the only ones that had ever talked or had any kind of conversation. So, I knew… When I left, I left saying to myself that they weren't alive. Knowing that they weren't moving and all that. I mean of course when we got to the hospital we were like, "My parents are there. Somebody needs to get out there."
>
> On the way to the hospital in the ambulance all I wanted to know was if my parents were dead. And I just kept saying it and saying it and saying it. I needed that kind of closure because I'm one of those, it's hard to explain my drive I guess, but I needed to know so I could take care of myself. He [the EMT] kept saying, "Tell your sister to shut up. Tell her to shut up." And finally he said, "Yes. Your parents are dead." I guess for some reason he thought I'd probably give up just knowing that, but really I think it gives you more drive.

Greta remembers a conversation she had with her mother a few weeks before the murders. At the time of the conversation, it seemed that the statement wasn't related to anything in particular. Her mother's comment has taken on great meaning for Greta.

> Two weeks before, I think it was about two weeks before my mom and dad were killed, it's really strange, we were coming to the City for something. And she had looked at me and she said, "Greta, if anything ever happens to your dad and I, I want you to go on with your life. I want you to be happy. I want you to…" It was really weird that she'd said that and I remember crying and going, "Mom, nothing's ever going to happen to you two. Why are you saying that?" I think I had always subconsciously kept that in my head and

thought, you know, my parents would want me to turn this in to something positive. My mom wanted me to go on. She didn't want me to, you know, be like everyone else would. I think I always kept that in my head.

Greta and her brother were seriously wounded. She was in the hospital's intensive care unit for over a week and was sedated for much of that time. The adults tried to keep them shielded from the news stories. Greta was concerned with what was going to happen to her now that her parents were gone.

I think they kept us pretty well sedated for about a week because we were both in intensive care for like a week and a half. We were in the hospital for almost a month. We were so overwhelmed at the time that they didn't allow us… there was a lot of publicity on the news about them and the funeral and the whole bit, but they were trying to keep us from seeing any of it. Of course, they had to because they knew there would be a lot going on. Hunting for the men and trials and all that and they didn't want us to be exposed to all the media that was going on.

I think initially it was more just a survival mode. I just couldn't think about what I had lost. It was more like, "Oh my God. What's going to happen to me now? Where am I going to live? What am I going to do?" Because there was no way we were going to live with some family of my dad's. I mean the situation was just like… you know you have the good-bad side. That was the bad side. You would never live in that situation. My mother's parents and brothers lived in Tennessee, so I was never around them. The only relative I was around was her [mother's] first cousin. She was the one that I asked for, that we asked for, and who stayed with me in the hospital. Really, I was more concerned about what's happening to me. Where am I going to go? Where am I going to be? That went on for a couple of months. Then I went through all the paranoia of being out at restaurants and seeing weird people that I'd think were, not them [the murderers], but I started, what do I say, stereotyping people that looked like they did. I couldn't sit in a restaurant very long without seeing somebody

and I'd go, "Let's go. Let's go. Let's go. I don't feel comfortable." I think that, for a long time I just let myself go into "it happened to somebody else." I think I did not start dealing with a lot of it until my late twenties.

Angela

"I saw him lying on the stretcher. He was purple from the chest up."

Angela was only 16 when her father died suddenly from a heart attack that may have resulted from a blood clot. He was a polio survivor and had recently undergone hip replacement surgery. His death was "off-time." Losing a parent in adolescence is difficult because teens are beginning to push against parental control. They may even feel guilty when the parent dies because of their desire to be free from the parent's influence (McGoldrick & Walsh, 1991).

> …the death of a parent is likely to be complicated by negative and conflictual feelings toward the parent. If other family members idealize the deceased parent, the adolescent's experience of disqualification may lead to an increased sense of being cut off and isolated from family members and of not being understood. (McGoldrick & Walsh, 1991, p. 41)

Angela's father may have been an alcoholic. He took out his frustrations on his family. These behaviors added to any negative or conflictual feelings Angela may have felt when he died suddenly. The loss of her father was an important loss for Angela. Her memories of the night he died are vivid.

> I lost my dad when I was 16 years old; he died unexpectedly in the middle of the night of a heart attack. This would have been in 1966, March 13th, 1966 at something like 1:30 a.m. And I can remember it distinctly because it was such an event.
>
> I'm the oldest of four children and we had recently moved to a new town where he was becoming an executive of a [major] tire company. It was a big deal promotion and they had just run him through a physical checkup because my dad was handicapped by polio, which had held back his career. They said you're doing fine, you've got a little high

cholesterol but your good to go and that had just been a month earlier before this date. He and my mother had been out having an Italian meal that night and he came home with indigestion.

We were living in a little rent house in a town of about 2,000 and people didn't know that we weren't pretty low income because of where we were living. Living in an older rental house. My sister slept on the landing of the stairs and my brother slept in a big room upstairs and I slept in a tiny room off the parlor and my parents slept in what probably was the formal dining room of this house. We were just making do for a while.

And I heard my parents come in and go to bed and talk about not feeling well.

"No it's fine, I'll be fine."

And I heard my mother get up and she was pretty panicked. The phone was between me and them in the living room. And she got on the phone and called the local MD, who at that time would make house calls in the middle of the right. And he popped over and I was afraid of being punished so I stayed in my room. My dad had a quick temper and was pretty handy with a belt. I stayed in my bedroom listening to see what was going on, but to stay out of the line of fire. When the doctor came in, he went into the bedroom and told my mother to call the ambulance right now and sent her out of the room. She did. She was fumbling with the phone and then he came marching in there and grabbed the phone from her and called the ambulance himself and told them to get over there pronto.

It's amazing the details you remember about something like that. At the same time he escorted her out the back door and the ambulance guys came in and put my dad on a stretcher and were carrying him to the front. My room, my door, looked into the living room and was right by the front door. I saw him lying on the stretcher. He was purple from the chest up. And he had this expression of fear, like open mouth amazement. He was both scared and... "What's happening to me?" I don't know how to describe it. I can see it, but

it's difficult to describe. I didn't know he was dead. He looked... and I just didn't know. But I sensed that and he was.

The ambulance guys were young men and they made a point of coming back to the house, it's a small town, to tell me that they tried to revive him in the ambulance. Maybe they came back that night I can't remember. But they told ***me*** [emphasized] personally that they tried to revive him and to give him CPR but it just didn't work. But anyway, I didn't know that at the time. I was trying to just figure things out.

I was waiting for my mother to return. The nearest hospital was in a town about a 20-minute drive away, maybe 30 minutes. So they had to go there to have access to a hospital. She was riding with the doctor and she didn't know what I knew or what I sensed. I kept waiting for them to return and tell me.

I remember lying awake on the couch for like a couple of hours it seemed like. I remember the time because we had a clock, and eight-day clock, that made a really loud ticking noise. And coincidentally, it now belongs to me and I can't listen to it without often thinking of that. I've adapted to it but at first I didn't want the clock in the house and I couldn't figure out why and then I realized it was because I spent the wee hours of the morning, after all these people left, waiting for my mother to return and to be told that my dad had died, listening to this tick tock tick tock tick tock and then chimes every quarter hour. So I knew the pattern of the chimes. I was trying to stay awake.

She came to the back door. It was 3:30.

"He's gone, he's gone!" she said and she just crumpled in my arms.

And then we began doing the things that you do, to call people, to clean house, because it's something to do to prepare for people to come over. So that was the incident.

I tried to tell... I tried to find a way to talk about it. We didn't talk, ever, in my house about things. We had been taught not to cry and to be stoic about things. You don't let them see you sweat. No one said that, acted as if that would've been a good thing.

I remember people coming over to the house, in my bedroom, in my tiny narrow bedroom, filled with students in my class. And I'd only be going to school there for three months. These weren't people that I knew well. I was a new kid. They didn't know what to say to me and I didn't know what to say to them. I guess they expected me to be real emotional and we weren't to be emotional and I wasn't.

Angela was 50 years old when her mother died 34 years later from cancer. She didn't talk about the circumstances surrounding her mother's death.

Fran

"When he didn't come back she went and checked on him and found him with his head on the seat."

Fran was 18 and a college freshman when her father died from a blood clot. This "off-time" loss occurred just as Fran was moving into young adulthood. This can be a critical time for young adults and all concerned can underestimate the effect of losing a parent.

> Given the developmental tasks of young adulthood and the culturally sanctioned tendency to deny the importance of family ties at this time, the impact of loss of a parent for young adults may be seriously underestimated by them and their families, friends, and even therapists. …They are likely to be torn between their own immediate pursuits and filial caretaking obligations. …Coping with a dying parent may stir fears of a loss of self. The impact of the parental loss itself may not be acknowledged, and the young adult may distance still further from the family. (McGoldrick & Walsh, 1991, p. 34)

My father died first. I was 18 when my dad died. He was 48. I was Daddy's girl. He had had a stroke when I was 16, right before my 16th birthday. He had a heatstroke, or sunstroke. He was out hauling hay. It left him paralyzed for three years. There was a blood clot in the brain. They didn't know how to deal with it then. That's been 30 years ago. Now they have cures for heatstroke and the brain. At that time they told him that as it started dissolving he would get better.

His right side was paralyzed. He couldn't walk for a year or year and a half. He finally did learn to walk again. You could tell something was wrong, you know. His speech

very… something was wrong. But as time went on and this blood clot dissolved, he did get better. And the last month before he died he'd made the comment that he was feeling his shoe on his foot. Kind of like prickly, like asleep. He was beginning to really get some feeling back. His speech had gotten a whole lot better. Then, sure enough, it dislodged and just killed him instantly.

I was away at college at the time. I had been through my first year of college. I had made the decision to stay in the college town that summer because I liked being away from home. I liked being on my own. I had met Kevin by that time. And I was going to stay.

It happened on a Thursday, and I was going home on Friday. So yeah, it was real bad. Dad even made the comment that morning to Mom about Fran coming home today. She said, no. It'll be tomorrow. She said he looked really upset when she said that. He went out to roll the car windows down on the car because it was really hot that day. When he didn't come back she went and checked on him and found him with his head on the seat. He was on his knees, like he was rolling the car window down. So it was quite a shock. We knew, for three years we'd known something was wrong.

Dad was real active before he had his stroke. I was in the band and he went on all the band trips with us. He drove the bus. The kids wanted him to drive the bus. When they'd say, who do you want to go as sponsors, my dad's name was always the first one up. He was very active with us.

Just about the time Fran thought things were getting better, maybe getting closer to normal, her father died. This was the first death of a close family member for Fran.

I guess I was pretty numb. Pretty lost. Felt guilty for not being there. I felt guilty that I'd stayed away. I just remember feeling numb. Looking back, like I'm looking at myself, I didn't want to eat. I know they had trouble getting me to eat for a while. I don't remember that part, but I remember them telling me later. So, just kind of numb. He was probably the

first death of a close relative that I had gone through, anyway. And being 18, it was just real hard to handle. I just felt lost.

So I came on back to town. I stayed at home for three weeks, four weeks. I came on back because I went to summer school that summer. When I would go home on the weekends it was the hardest because if Mother was at work when I got in… It used to be it was Dad sitting in the chair when I walked in, but now I was walking into an empty house. And I remember about three months after, it really hit me that weekend, and I had a real rough weekend. Because I walked in expecting Dad to sit there and he wasn't there. It just took that long for it to finally sink in that he wasn't coming back. He wasn't in the hospital. He had been at the rehabilitation center off and on for a year, so we were used to him being gone there. He had lived with my grandparents, his parents, for six months after it happened, after the stroke happened, because my uncle was a nurse. He was just bedridden. Mother couldn't do with him. We didn't have money for in-home care. Thirty years ago they didn't have home health like they do now. So he went to Missouri and lived with my grandparents so that my uncle could help take care of him. So we were used to him being gone. But it took a good three or four months after he died for me for it to really set in, and I guess it's because there'd been so many times he'd been gone in the last three years that it just finally hit me. He wasn't coming home this time. You can pretend for a while. I guess I did. I just pushed it off. But it was at that point that I realized he wasn't coming home.

Five years later Fran's mother died from a pulmonary embolism. Fran was 23. She had been married only a year and a half when her mother died. While she hadn't been particularly close to her mother prior to her father's death, she and her mother had grown closer during the interim five years. Fran's mother's death was unexpected. She hadn't been ill. Fran was concerned about her mother's sudden illness, but did not think it was life threatening.

She had a pulmonary embolism. She passed out at work one day. She was in the hospital about a week and a half before she died. But, literally, it was a week and half from the time she collapsed at work and passed away. She was in the hospital. They let her out. I went up on Saturday. She still wasn't feeling good. She had a seizure Sunday afternoon. No Saturday afternoon. We transferred her from the local hospital to the regional hospital on Sunday and she died Monday night. So, it was just boom, boom, boom.

You don't think about her dying. I look back on it and wish I'd done some things different. The doctor, when they coded her, they called the house and they talked to Kevin, thank goodness, and told Kevin they'd coded her. He just told me I needed to get to the hospital. I get there and she's not in her room, so I assume she's dead then. He, evidently, called his mother right after I left because she got there within minutes of me getting there. I'm sitting there crying. Marian stopped a passing nurse.

"When did she pass away?" Marian asked.

"Oh, she didn't pass away. She's in here."

I looked up at that nurse. "You mean she's not dead?" I said.

"No, honey."

Well, no one told me. So, a little later the doctor came out.

"Do you want to go see your mom?" he asked.

"No, I want to stay out of your way."

I knew enough about the medical field that I wanted to stay out of the way. Well, then they decided they needed to put a pacemaker in immediately. They had a doctor coming in the next day to do that surgery. My uncle had left Kansas City to go get my grandmother in Missouri and they were coming down for the surgery the next morning. They wanted to put a temporary in. They wanted to know if I wanted to go see her before they started.

"No, I want to stay out of your way. I want you to get it done as fast as you can," I said.

> You don't dream they're going to die. So, when they came in when she actually died, both doctors came in the room, and it was a room full of people. They didn't really say a whole lot and they left. Five minutes later they came back in. That's when they told us she died. Well, we think back on it, she'd died the first time but they knew we weren't ready to hear it, because they told us the first time she was seizuring and was not stopping seizuring. Well, she'd probably died then, but they needed that buffer to tell us, and it still wasn't much of a buffer because we weren't expecting, you know… and she'd been fine talking to us in the hospital this whole time. So, it was a shock. We didn't have time to prepare for that one. It was definitely a shock.

Fran now felt responsible for her younger sister, who was now a college freshman. This is consistent with McGoldrick and Walsh's description of typical family expectations of the oldest child after the loss of a parent.

> This expectation tends to weigh most heavily on the eldest or most parentified child. The eldest son may be expected to become the head of the family with the death of his father, whereas daughters are typically expected to assume major caretaking functions for the surviving parent, younger siblings, and aged grandparents. (1991, p. 34)

Fran's sister expected her to make all the decisions and to take care of the disposition of her parents' belongings. Extended family members did little to support Fran after the funeral and assumed grieving period passed. Fran repeated that she had been married a year and a half when her mother died and that this loss was more traumatic for her.

> Even though I was closer to Dad, Mother was more traumatic for me. I think *because* I had already lost Dad. And it was like, that's it. I don't have any parents now. Mother's was more traumatic for me because she was it. She was the last one. We buried both of them in Missouri, so that was really hard. When Dad died it was so sudden that nobody really knew where to bury him or what to do. My grandfather had plots in Missouri where he grew up. We took him back there. So, when Mom died we, naturally, took her back to the same place.

So, it made it harder because we had two funerals. We had one in our hometown and one in Missouri. When Mom died, we had one in our hometown and one in Missouri. So, Mother's was traumatic in that, you know, the first time it was Dad's family there and the next time it was Mom's family and Dad's because that was the town that Dad's family was all from. And it was just a more traumatic loss. Not to mention that they had built a house. Now we had to go through the house with all their stuff. I had to decide what to do.

Helen [Fran's sister] was 18. One year of college. I'd been through one year of college when my dad died. She'd been through one year of college when my mom died. She didn't want to deal with it. She left it up to me, I guess because I was five years older, I'd been married a year and a half now, and it was all left up to me. So, I stayed in my parents' house and literally went through the house inch by inch and threw things away and got ready to have a sale of stuff. You know, I didn't know what to do with stuff. So, it was a more traumatic loss than Dad's. And I think purely because it was the second.

Fran felt as though she had nothing to offer her children. She had grown up with grandparents and even a great-grandparent. Even though she wasn't even pregnant yet, Fran grieved the loss of grandparents for her unborn children.

You don't expect it, at 23 years old. I'd been married a year and a half. I was already upset that my dad didn't get to walk me down the aisle. My dad didn't get to be around when I got married and now my mother's gone. What kind of grandparents are my kids going to have? Because I don't have grandparents for them and I always had four grandparents. I had five growing up. I had a great-grandfather for a while. Now I'm not giving my kids anything. So, the why and the guilt, and the feeling awful even for my unborn kids at that time just consumed me.

Fran became close to Marian, her mother-in-law, after her mother's death. Marian helped Fran as a young wife and mother and became a friend as well. Losing Marian was

very hard for Fran. It had only been two and a half years since Marian's death from colon cancer at the time of my interview with Fran.

> She had the cancer and got worse. We knew it was imminent. It was in the liver, so we knew that unless a miracle happened it wasn't going to take care of itself. So it was hard. Hers was probably the hardest loss because now I have no one. Not only do I not have a mother, I don't have a mother-in-law. I am the oldest woman in my family right now, not counting my aunts. I'm it. And that's kind of a scary thought to think at 45 years old, that I'm the oldest.
>
> I guess what scares me deep down is… I'm not afraid to die. I know where I'm going, but I don't want to leave my kids and put them through what I had to go through. It was the hardest thing to go through growing up without parents, basically. And I don't want to put them through that. But my mother-in-law was my mother-in-law longer than my real mother was alive. My real mother died when I was 23. My mother-in-law had been my mother-in-law for 24 years and I was an adult those 24 years. I was a child for part of my 23 years with my mother. I got probably closer to my mother-in-law than I had my real mother because I hadn't been close to her growing up. I really only had five years there with my mother.
>
> I think that all that combined made my mother-in-law's death harder for me. She'd filled that void and we got real close. She sewed. She cooked. She was a home economics teacher. She did all the things that my mother did, so she just stepped right in where Mom left off. We just picked right up. Everything was common. Everything that my mom and I enjoyed together, my mother-in-law and I enjoyed together. Just common things.
>
> He [God] gave me the best gift in my mother-in-law and father-in-law. A good Christian man and woman that took their kids to church. Kevin and I have compared. We were raised pretty much the same. He was just as strict on Kevin. He wasn't saved until he was an adult. Wallace wasn't saved until he was 22, 23. He went through the drinking period

as a teenager. So, I think he was strict on Betsy and Kevin for the same reason my dad was strict on us, because they'd been there. They knew what could happen. I really think Kevin and I tempered all that, so I hope the generation doesn't repeat itself. Now we were good with our kids, and they're going to be more lenient and they're kids are going to go wild. (Laughter.)

Two years passed after Marian's death and Fran found herself depressed. She didn't understand what was happening. She made an appointment with her doctor who prescribed antidepressants. Three months later the doctor thought more was needed.

"Have you considered counseling?" the doctor asked.

"Well, I had, but I didn't know what I'd tell a counselor. I don't know what's wrong," I said.

But he encouraged me to go on, so I did. I found a Christian counselor and I went. We talked and that's when he said, "I hear grief." It hadn't dawned on me until he said that, that I was grieving my mother-in-law. What we learned through that, I just went the one time, what we learned through that, and I don't want to place blame on anyone, but my family, my father-in-law, my sister-in-law, my husband, we don't discuss my mother-in-law. We didn't discuss my mother-in-law. She was never brought up. Her name was never mentioned.

Thanksgiving this year, it was my son, my husband, my daughter, and I. That was it. Christmas we added my father-in-law. My sister-in-law has been in my house two times. We bought Mom and Dad's [Marian and Wallace's] house and she's been in this house two times in the last year and a half. And Marian's never mentioned.

So, in a way that was keeping me from grieving, because no one would talk about her. [The counselor] indicated we need to talk about her, we need to remember her, remember her special things. Laugh about, oh, Marian said this, and laugh about it. He said you need that healing time. So, he recommended some books for me to get. *Don't Take My*

Grief Away From Me (Manning, 1979) and another one, and he recommended I leave them laying out for my father-in-law and my sister-in-law so they might pick them up. They haven't either one done that.

But Kevin and I had a really good visit. Kevin cried with me that night because I told him what the counselor had told me. I think it helped my husband go through the loss of his mother by me going through this. We talk about her now. We bring her up. She loved the flowers in the back yard and planted flowers. So every time we're out there we'll say, "Oh, wouldn't Mom like that?" I planted some tulips and I said, "Wouldn't Mom have loved those?" We've since pulled my father-in-law into that. He talks about her now more. My sister-in-law still is a problem. She won't discuss it with us. In fact, she was up a couple of weekends ago and I said something about Mom and she turned around and left the room. So, I don't know what the holidays are going to bring this year, but we had some really lonely holidays this year because I'm used to big family get-togethers and it was just us. Not that that's a bad thing, but it was just different. It was unusual.

Evelyn

"They simply sewed her back up because… that was the only thing they could do."

Evelyn was 27 years old when her mother died from uterine cancer. Her mother was 66 years old. This loss was "off-time" because children do not expect to lose a parent as young adults, and while 66 may seem old to a 27-year-old daughter, it's not considered elderly. Evelyn expected her mother to be around to grandparent her children as she had grandparented her other grandchildren. Evelyn did not seem to experience some of the problems McGoldrick and Walsh identified with parental loss by young couples.

> When the death of a parent occurs as young couples are focusing on their own lives, it may not be mourned as directly as at other life phases. …When marriage has improved intergenerational relationships, parental loss may not be as difficult as it might have been during the unattached young adult phase. On the other hand, the death of one parent may leave a child (especially an only child, or the only one living

> in the area) anxious about the dependence and neediness of the remaining parent, as much as grieving for the one who is lost. (McGoldrick & Walsh, 1991, p. 36)

Evelyn comes from a large family and the siblings were willing to share any felt responsibilities toward their father. The next to the youngest of eight children, Evelyn had five older brothers who may have fulfilled many societal expectations that children will take care of the surviving parent. Evelyn did not report any problems between her siblings that are often reported after the loss of a parent.

> An issue that receives scant clinical attention is the change in adult sibling relationships brought on by the death of a parent. Sisters are more likely to be stressed in this process than brothers, because of the expectation in our culture that daughters will be parental caretakers. Brothers tend to share the financial but not the caregiving responsibilities. Old sibling rivalries may erupt into conflict over who was more favored at the end, more burdened by caregiving, or more to blame for the death. (McGoldrick & Walsh, 1991, pp. 36-37)

Evelyn found the loss of her mother difficult, especially when her father remarried soon after her death.

> Losing my mother such a shock. She'd been ill. I think we knew that she'd not felt well for a number of years, but I had been gone. I was in Europe and then I was in New Mexico. We moved back [home] from New Mexico. Just shortly after we moved back I got a phone call one night, it was in October. I remember it very distinctly. And she said that she'd gone to the doctor because she'd been vaginally bleeding, she was far past menopause, and that they were going to have to do surgery. I think I mourned more at that point because I knew, I think I knew, what it meant at that point. That's the point when I actually mourned for my mother.
>
> They did do surgery. They were going to do a hysterectomy because they thought she had a tumor. She did have a tumor, but the cancer by that point had spread. It was in her liver. They said her intestines looked like they'd been shot with a shotgun. It was in her lungs. So they did not do the hysterectomy. They simply sewed her back up because they knew at that point that was the only thing they could do. She was going to die at that point.

She lived, that was in October, and she lived until July. And it was just… she was very ill from then on. They said it was uterine cancer. That's where, but I don't think that's definitive because the cancer was everywhere. That was simply one of the places. They think the tumor in the uterus had been there for many years. But we have since learned that we have a genetic thing; that it possibly, I now believe, could've started in her kidneys.

Evelyn, along with her six brothers and one sister, worked out a rotation system so that one of them would always be with their mother in the family home. Evelyn was pregnant with her first child during this time, but managed to be with her mother despite feeling unwell from the pregnancy. After the school year ended, Evelyn went home to stay with her mother.

[When she died] I was really so numb. She had been so ill and she had been at home. Since I come from a large family, what we decided, so that no one just wore themselves out, we would start 24-hour shifts. We would go on duty at 3:00 in the afternoon and stay until 3:00 the next afternoon and just take care of her. She was home and we were doing that. This was after my school was out. Because I lived a distance from her I went home at that point to take care of her. But I was pregnant. I had just found out I was pregnant. I was not sick, so I could take care of her, but I was sore and various other things, but I went home to take care of her. But her fever would go to 104. We had medicine we would give her and it would go down some, but she was so very ill. So, she called me in the bedroom and she told me one of the times I was there, she said that she had decided to go into a nursing home because she thought it would be better and that they could give her stronger medicine. But I think what she was trying to tell me is she didn't want to die at home, because she didn't want us to have that memory of home.

So she went to the nursing home about 25 miles away. We still continued the 24-hour thing. She was never alone. One of us was always there with her. We did that for her and we did it for Daddy also because he would come every morning and he would stay all

day, but he would just get so tired. So we did it so he could go home at night and do what he needed to do.

One of the last things I told my mother was that I was pregnant. This is one of the last things that she knew, that she was conscious. I had come and I had stayed with her. I didn't know whether to tell her or not because I knew that she would never see the baby and I knew that she would know she was never going to see the baby. But she had worried about me because I had been married for many years in her world and I had not had a child. I think she was scared that I would never have children because I was not like everybody else in her world. I didn't know whether to tell her. I had asked my brothers and my sister and they said, yes, that I should tell her. And when I told her, she cried. She was so happy that I was having this baby. And that was one week, and when I came back the next week she was unconscious. So it was one of the last things that she really knew.

I had done my 24-hours and had gone home. They called me early in the morning, 3 or 4 o'clock, and told me they thought it was time and that I should come and when I come I should be prepared to stay because they knew. When I got there she had died.

I felt… I was so sad because really the stabilizing force of my life was gone. Mother had always been our stabilizing force. She was the anchor. She was the rock. Daddy may've been the one who worked, but she was the center of all of our universes. So I felt really sad, and something was taken away that I knew I'd never have again.

Twenty-five years later Evelyn's father died from natural causes at the age of 93. She was 52. She, along with her brothers and sister, again worked out a rotation system to stay with their father while he was in the hospital. Her response to his death was different from the response to the loss of her mother.

It was at the end of the semester. It was the last day of finals. I didn't have any finals. It was on a Friday. I had done all my finals. He was in the hospital. We were staying with him during the day. We had a nurse who came in at night because all of us were

working. One of us would be there every morning at 7 o'clock and we would relieve the nurse. We would stay with him until that evening when the nurse came back on duty. I mean this was just a practical nurse that had taken care of him some at home. She would come on duty to spend the night in his room.

I was on duty that morning, that Friday morning, because I didn't have any classes. So I left the house, because he was in [a town over an hour away] in the hospital, and I left the house at probably 5:30 because I was supposed to be on duty at 7 at the hospital. Right after I left the house my brother called. He had died during the night. So when I got to the hospital my sister-in-law met me and told me.

It was a totally different experience. I think his being 93 had a lot to do with it. I think that the fact that he married shortly after Mother died. It was a year later that he married. And the woman that he married didn't care for me a lot and wasn't welcoming so that I wanted to come home. My father smoked; she smoked. I didn't want my children in that because generally if we did go they'd end up sick. They didn't just smoke a little; they smoked continuously. So it was really hard.

I went [to the hospital]. He was gone. I met with my brothers and sister. We made some decisions. Then I thought, okay, what do I do now? So I went back to work because there was nothing else to do.

Less than six months after her father died, Evelyn's mother-in-law, Mrs. W., died. Mrs. W. had, in many ways, filled the role of Evelyn's mother. This was a significant loss for Evelyn.

We were very close, probably closer than her own daughter because she could say things to me, because I was more like her than her own daughter was.

She died the May after my father had died in December. I think her death was important to me. I think it was really important to me. I was her daughter-in-law longer… no I wasn't. She had me as her daughter-in-law almost as long as my mother had me.

Brenda

"My dad thought she was going to get well. … I didn't want to take his hope away."

Brenda was 36 years old when her mother, Iris, died from a malignant brain tumor. The brain tumor caused some changes in her mother's personality. Always fun-loving and practical, Iris became stressed and worried over things that had never troubled her before. This change was hard on Brenda, Charlotte, and the rest of the family. They tried to help their mother, but found it difficult to get through. She was 39 when her father died three years later from lung cancer.

> Mother became, because she had a malignant brain tumor, a different person for a while than what she had always been. She was real stressed and real worried before she had surgery and she just could not get a grip on the things that were bothering her. She was so convinced she wasn't saved. And we were thinking, "I don't think so, Mother. Mother, I believe you are." But it was a thought that really bothered her so it bothered us too. Charlotte called Brother Criswell at the First Baptist Church in Dallas. She called him on the phone and got someone on his staff to talk to us and she [Mother] still didn't know. The only person that got through to her, and we don't know why, was Howard's sister's husband. She kept saying she wanted to talk to Richard. So we got him over and she talked him and she felt a lot better after that. I think that was probably the hardest time that we had, between the time when she started getting sick until she had surgery. After she had surgery I remember that the first thing that I asked her after she was back to herself was, "Mom, do you ever worry about being saved?" She said, "Oh no, I don't ever worry about that." After she had surgery that was not an issue whatsoever.

Surgery, while it helped Brenda's mother become more like herself, was not a cure. Doctors told the family the tumor could not be entirely removed. Brenda made arrangements to care for her mother in her home.

Of course we knew that she was not going to live long. When she was in the hospital she went into a coma, which was hard on us because of not knowing what that meant... we were expecting it to be, that she would not ever wake up. So we brought her home since they said there wasn't anything else we could do. We brought her home and she had a tube, a feeding tube, and that's the way I gave her medicine and everything. We got the hospital bed and the things that would make her more comfortable.

One morning I got up and I looked in there, from my room I could see her, and I thought, "There's something different about her." She was awake for one thing. She had taken the feeding tube out and rolled it up and put it beside her pillow.

"Oh, Mama, what did you do?" I said. I mean, the first thing, not that you're awake, but oh no, what did you do? Because I thought, "How am I going to give you your medicine?"

"I don't know, there was something in my nose," she said.

So I called the doctor and I asked him what I should do.

"Well see if she'll eat and see how she'll do," he said.

She just woke up. She was taking radiation and I think it may have put her brain to sleep for a while. I don't know. After that she started eating. She was hungry. She took her medicine. So it was better for a while.

My dad thought she was going to get well. I never thought she was going to get well. I think when she first had surgery I thought she would, but when the doctor told us it was malignant I knew she wasn't. It was just like God told me, she's not going to get well so get ready. I had to deal with Daddy about that. You know, I never did tell him. I didn't want to take his hope away. But I knew she wasn't.

We enjoyed the time that we had because she wasn't in any pain. She was paralyzed on one side because of the surgery and because they couldn't get all of it [the tumor]. She

wasn't in any pain. She would say some things that were kind of weird sometimes, but only occasionally.

And so that went on. She lived a year after she had surgery. We had some family things. We would see glimpses of her old self, her humor and stuff. It was hard but I think it was easier for me than it was for Charlotte because she lived so far away and she couldn't be here.

Before Iris had surgery, Brenda and Charlotte were able to spend some time with her. They were able to talk about topics that were important to each of them. No one knew at that point that Iris would not recover. Brenda remembers the conversation as "good."

There was a period in there when she was first sick that I think she thought she was having a nervous breakdown. We would talk to her. I remember one day Charlotte was there. Charlotte came and spent a lot of time with her then. We were sitting in there talking to her. She was lying on the bed and we were talking. We talked about lots of stuff. We told her everything we wanted her to know. And it wasn't like we knew she was going to die. It just came out. So it was good.

Brenda, as Iris's primary caregiver, watched her mother's deterioration over the year after the surgery.

Because she'd been at my house, I had watched her go downhill. After a period of time she got to where she didn't talk too much, she didn't eat, then she started having convulsions and things like that. I think the very first thing I felt was when I realized that she had died was, "This can't be. She's dead." Then it was relief.

Brenda grieved for the loss of her mother long before she actually died. While she felt a sense of relief, it was the period of time after the funeral – when life was going back to the way it was before Iris became ill – that bothered Brenda most.

I think what bothered me most was not during the funeral, because my family is the kind of family that when someone dies we all get together and you talk about stuff that was fun and everything and that's one of the good things. But I think afterwards it was little things, like if I forgot how to make something I would pick up the phone to call Mother. She lived at my house for a year, but I'd still pick the phone up to call her old number. It was like that year that she was sick was set aside. I was going back to the way she was before she got sick.

Something would happen to me, like I did something good or somebody said something about me. You can tell your mother that stuff and it's not like you're bragging. So I'd pick up the phone to say guess what so-and-so said about me. And nobody else really cares. That's another thing that bothered me, that I think you missed the most, is knowing that there's somebody in the world who loves you. No matter what.

After Iris died, Brenda was more concerned about her father's grieving over the loss of Iris than about his cancer. Her father lost not only Iris, but everything he owned.

I think what bothered me with Daddy was, not so much his illness, but that he was so miserable when Mother died. He kept looking for the same kind of life that he had. So that hurt because it hurt him so much. He wasn't sick as long as Mother. I don't think he had a lot of pain either after he started having his chemo. He wasn't in a lot of pain like a lot of cancer patients are in terrible, terrible pain. And they were both blessed that they didn't have that.

Daddy was a strong man and when he got sick he couldn't do anything. (Sob.) Sometimes I think that bothered him more than Mother because Daddy had always taken care of us physically. Mother took care of everything else. Daddy took care of fixing stuff. And he couldn't do that anymore.

One time we had a lake lot. We bought it because Mother always wanted to move to East Texas. Howard [Brenda's husband] decided that we weren't going to wait around

until we were old and dead and not have what we wanted. So Daddy bought one right next to us. We enjoyed everything a lot down there. This was before he got sick. We enjoyed it. We cleaned it. Mother had died, but we spent a lot of time there. We would sleep outside with the kids. Then we went to a travel trailer and then we went to a mobile home and Daddy was in the travel trailer. We did a lot of things there. Once, after he got sick, we were staying down there a few days. Howard had gone to work. And I was mowing and a wheel kept coming off the mower, so I would put it back on and it would come off. I put it back on and it would come off. So Daddy came out there. He was real weak from taking chemo. Always before he would fix everything. So he put it back on and of course it came off again. But I went around the back of the house and just sat down on the porch and cried and played like it was still on. I told him, "I'm just tired of mowing. I'm not going to mow anymore."

Before they got sick they were still vibrant, having fun. Daddy was strong. He always had been. He was a little bit skinny, but he was real strong. He'd always worked hard. After Mother died it was like he just gave up. I think it's easier... a woman can handle it better, I think, when her husband dies than the husband can handle it when his wife dies. I think it's because, well in Mother and Daddy's case, Daddy was the strong one physically and he could fix anything, he made a living, but Mother took care of everything else. She took care of the bills. She took care of his appointments. She took care of all the books – income tax, that kind of stuff. She was always the calm, steady influence on all of us. She never yelled or raised her voice to any of us or to the grandkids. We got spankings a lot. She taught us a lot. I wish I was the same kind of mother she was, but I'm not.

When Daddy died, I think to him it was a relief because he missed Mother so much. It was like she was him, a part of him. I think that really bothered me about Daddy because he was so sad before he died.

Brenda believed her father would never recover from the loss of Iris. This helped her make sense of his death. The lives and deaths of her parents changed Brenda.

> I think the only reason he held on as long as he did was because of Charlotte and me. He thought he was still supposed to take care of us. But all in all their living and dying has changed my life. I don't know what I'd do if it hadn't been for them. It's made Charlotte and I close. We were always close but we've really gotten close since they passed away.

Brenda lost both her parents much sooner than she expected. We don't expect our parents to die when we are in our thirties. With the passage of time, Brenda has concluded her parents may be better off for having died early, before age and slowly declining health took their toll.

> I've looked at some of my cousins and their parents and they've gotten old. They didn't have any kind of life for maybe years – eight to 10 years. But Mother and Daddy... Mother was sick for year. Daddy was sick for about eight months, so even though they were young – Mother was 62 and Daddy was 64 – sometimes I think in a way it was better. Not for them because they never got to see their great grandkids and things like that. It was probably better for them in the long run when you look back, instead of getting where they couldn't do anything.

Charlotte

"… when you see a house that has been torn apart by a tornado, that's exactly how I felt inside."

Charlotte was 34 and 37, respectively, when her mother and father died. While most of the women in this study remembered the date of their parents' deaths, Charlotte has blocked out those dates. She prefers to remember their lives, rather than the moment of their deaths.

Mother died in 1981. Daddy died four years later. I've blocked the dates out. The only reason that I remember that Mother died in '81 is because my son was two years old. With Daddy I don't have that, there's not something in there to associate that with. I can't even tell you the month that Mother and Daddy died. Mother died in the summer and I think Daddy died in the fall. But other than that, that's the closest I can get without looking it up. I don't think about the dates of their death. I don't associate them with their death.

Charlotte was living out of state when Iris became ill. She knew something wasn't quite right, but wasn't overly concerned, until she received a disturbing letter from her mother.

When we first found out she was sick it was very worrisome because she wasn't acting like herself. She was mentally not together. She was not acting like herself. I knew she had been sick because Brenda had been telling me that something was wrong with her. That they couldn't find out what it was. You could talk to her on the phone and you knew there was a little something wrong. But I still didn't associate it with a serious illness. I got a letter from Mother. Mother was not a stupid person, and I got a letter from Mother and the envelope had my name, street address, and the town all written on one line on one side of the envelope. When I opened the letter, the letter made absolutely no sense at all. It was just words on a piece of paper. They didn't string together in sentences. I knew immediately something was wrong. I immediately came home.

When we got home we found out. I was devastated. It was... I don't even know if I can find the words to say, we knew that she was going to die... my whole world just stopped and revolved around her illness. And revolved around my grief. I was so sick that she was going to die. I was devastated. There was no consoling me. There was nothing that I wanted but for my mother to live. I spent the whole time just praying and begging and begging and begging God to save her life. That was what my life revolved around for a time, when we found out that she was going to die, I was just devastated. There's no other word

besides that. A counselor asked me one time to describe how it was. And I said the only way I could describe my feelings was that when you see a house that has been torn apart by a tornado, that's exactly how I felt inside. I was torn apart. I was just devastated. Of course, her illness drug out so long, by the time she passed away some of that shock and devastation had gone but it was replaced with the deep sense of sadness and loss, emptiness. I was just so sad all the time. Nothing could, not the kids, not my husband; nothing could take the empty feeling out of my heart. I was just sad all the time. I would want to call her, pick up the phone. Part of my life that I shared with her all the time was gone. It just wasn't there anymore. More than anything I was just devastated. My life came to halt.

Charlotte was also concerned about her father's reaction to the loss of his wife. She believed he would never recover from his loss. She sees his death as a release from grief and pain.

I did not love Daddy any less than I loved Mother. I miss him just as much as I miss her. But Daddy was probably devastated more than we were. He was absolutely the most miserable and unhappy person you had seen in your life. He could not live without Mother. And even though he married twice, he was just looking for another Mother. He was so unhappy, he was so devastated, he was so miserable and Brenda and I knew he would be miserable for the rest of his life. And not that I missed him any less, it was just that he wasn't miserable anymore. It seems kind of strange I understand, Mother was ill and in a coma a lot, I still didn't want her to go. But after going through that, with Daddy being so unhappy... I wouldn't say it was easy, but he was so unhappy, I knew he was better off, that he would never be happy again as long as he lived. I felt that he was no longer suffering from that terrible grief.

Another thing, too, you know what to expect. I'd already been through it. You know what your feelings are going to be. I miss him just as much as I do Mother but with him being so unhappy it was a relief for him and he wanted to die. I think that Brenda and I

and Granddaddy used to be concerned that he was going to commit suicide. Sometimes I think that the only reason he didn't was because he knew how Brenda and I and the kids and everyone would be hurt. So I think Daddy wanted to die. Other than to leave us, he said one time other than leaving us and knowing that we would be hurt, he had no problem dying.

So it was not quite as difficult, it was not quite as devastating at the time because he was so miserable. I knew he would never change. Daddy depended on Mother for everything. Everything. He couldn't cook. He couldn't do anything. He depended on Mother to even say you shouldn't do this. You should do that. And Daddy had a temper and Mother kept that temper under control. They had been married so many years and sometimes it might not appear so, but he was devoted to Mother. When he lost her he lost everything. He lost his house. He lost his business. He lost everything. And he was 62 years old back living with his parents. And I thought how humiliating is that to a man who had always supported his family, taken care of his family, always taken care of his parents, and felt responsible for his younger brothers and sisters. Even though they didn't need him, he still felt responsible for them. I can remember [his younger brothers] calling and asking him questions if it was nothing more than keeping their cars running, asking him questions and stuff. My cousins, his nieces and nephews, depended on him quite a bit because he had the wrecker service. They were always calling him. Uncle Lonnie I need help. And he always felt like he helped a little to take care of people. Then all of a sudden he's relegated to living with his parents again and depending on his children to support him. And he was just absolutely miserable.

Dorothy

"So when he passed away it didn't bother me very much."

Dorothy was 32 years old when her father died from a heart attack. He had suffered from a crippling form of arthritis for many years and was an alcoholic. Ten years later her mother died from colon cancer.

> My father suffered from a very crippling form of arthritis that made it difficult for him to walk. It was in one leg and a hip. Then he had heart problems. He actually died from his third heart attack. He died at home. My mother called the ambulance. Then she called me. By the time I got there I saw them taking him out and working on him but he was actually dead. But they were trying to revive him.

Dorothy had suffered abuse from her father so long that she had little feeling for him by the time he died. She was more concerned about her mother's feelings and how she would survive without her husband.

> So when he passed away it didn't bother me very much. I think the feelings I had were because of the loss my mother felt. But as far as me, I didn't really care.

Seven years later Dorothy's mother developed cancer. Dorothy was divorced by this time, so she and her two sons moved in with her mother. Dorothy cared for her mother until a few months before she died. Her mother decided she wanted to go stay with a brother in a neighboring state. Dorothy did not make the trip to be with her mother when she died.

> My mother had colon cancer. She lived for about, I'll say, three years. She went downhill from there. I cared for her up until I guess two months before she passed and then she asked her brother to come and get her and take her to [a neighboring state] because she didn't want to die with me there alone, because I didn't have any hospice or anything. Our

family doctor had tried to convince me to put her in a home or get some help but I was stubborn. I felt like I wanted to do it.

[I didn't try to make a trip to see her before she died] because of the school situation and my sons. And I just frankly didn't want to go. It wasn't until after she passed. What I had to do was work with the funeral home here in the City and work with the funeral home in [the state where she died] to make the arrangements, pay the money, and all that.

We, my sons and I, and one of her life-long friends went to her funeral and came right back. And I remember, my son had a brand new Grand Am. He was a student here at [the university]. I drove that car so hard to [the funeral] and back that he had to get a new motor. I was just wanting to get back. Fortunately one of my good friends was visiting here from Minnesota. She agreed to stay at my house because I had pets then, and I still have pets, so I was just wanting to get back.

Telling Our Stories – The Journey to Meaning

The type of death, age of the parent, age of the surviving daughter, the quality of relationship, and whether the death was that of the first or second parent appears to have affected how the women in this study viewed the loss of their parents. Each of the women freely moved among the three types of narrative (internal, external, and reflexive) as they told their stories. After the loss of the first parent, and again after the loss of the second parent, these women were faced with many changes in their lives. The challenges and changes were often unexpected.

CHAPTER FOUR – CHANGES

Life is Different Now

Marsha – 1996

Orphaned. Was it possible? Mother and Daddy are gone. Regina and I are alone in this world. Our parents are dead. A husband isn't a stand-in for a parent. Yes, we fit the definition of orphans, unless you consider the fact that I'm 43 years old and Regina is 40. Adults aren't orphaned, but we felt like orphans – all alone and no place to call home. I didn't feel this way when Daddy died, but I wasn't orphaned when he died. I still had my mother. Here I am a middle-aged woman and I feel like an orphan. On top of this, I see myself as the next in line to die. Now I'm the older generation. I'm the ADULT. I thought I was an adult. I've paid for and completed two college degrees, married and buried one husband, and married a second one. I live 1,500 miles away from my relatives, have an excellent credit rating, and can set goals and achieve them. But losing my mother means there is no one between death and me. As long as I had at least one parent living, I had a buffer protecting me from the world. I wasn't completely responsible, even though I thought I thought I was all grown up. There was always someone to turn to who had greater wisdom and more experience than I. Someone who knew me better and longer than anyone else can or will ever again. They could tell me about my past and encourage me about my present and believe in my future. Yes, I really am an orphan now – a reluctant adult who is now facing life without the sure foundation of my parents' love, understanding, support, and presence. How will I survive?

Confronting Our Own Mortality

When the second parent dies adults are often confronted with their own mortality and vulnerability. They are now, suddenly, the older generation, the next in line to die (McGoldrick & Walsh, 1991). Each of the women in this study said they felt like an adult

after the second parent died. Greta, who was only 13 when her parents died, also felt that she had to take on the role of an adult. The other six women were chronologically adults when their parents died. This feeling came as a surprise to all of the women. With the exception of Greta, the women were or had been married and were performing the role of adult in both home and professional environments.

All of the women except Dorothy also said they felt like an orphan after the second parent died. Obviously Greta was an orphan at age 13, but the other women had never considered individuals to be orphaned after they were legally adults. The women were facing the reality that they no longer had an intact family of origin. It did not matter that they had husbands, children, grandchildren, or siblings. They now felt alone – orphaned – while at the same time feeling as though they were now taking on the role of adult in their own lives.

Brenda

> I think it was a whole way of life. It was different. After she died I kind of felt that I was in charge or something. I was kind of lost for a while because I didn't know how to do it.

Charlotte

> I don't think I grew up until Mother and Daddy died. I was still very selfish and childlike in a lot of things. When they died I realized I had to take control of my own life.

Greta

> I grew up overnight. It was almost like I became, to me I became an adult overnight. It was just like, nobody would ever see my life as the same. Even when I moved to live with my mother's cousin to go to high school, the girls were jealous and mean. They didn't know about the rape. Nobody did, I mean as far as what I'd gone through. But it was just like all they cared about was this girl was coming in to steal their guys. And that wasn't my

personality. I was really quiet. They took it I was being a snob. And I was like being quiet. Okay you know everything about me and I know nothing about you.

Well, nobody is going to love me as much as my parents did. So now I'm out for myself.

Fran

I felt orphaned. Not as much so as my sister, because I had Wallace and Marian, Kevin's parents. So I didn't feel as much orphaned as my sister did. But, yeah, I did. I had some aunts that stepped in immediately, but after a couple of years that kind of waned off and they quit calling. They quit sending cards and I guess that's natural. I hope if I'm ever put in that position I don't do the same thing to a niece or nephew. I hope that I'm there for them always. I haven't felt like they've been there for me always. And that's okay. Everybody has their own things in life. But, yeah, I feel orphaned. Now I had three grandparents still alive at the time. So I lost my parents, but I had grandparents. My grandparents helped fill the gap there. But I did feel kind of out there. Alone. It's like there's no one left.

[Now] it's, "I'm next." I went through a really rough time probably in my late twenties to early thirties of even questioning my salvation. I think at the root of it I was scared of death. What if I die? What if I die early like my parents did? Even though I wasn't quite that old yet, that hit me and I really questioned whether I was saved and where I would go. Kevin and I drew up a will early. We had life insurance policies early. The insurance agents couldn't believe it. But when they found out both my parents were deceased, then they understood why we were trying to take precautions. It could happen. If it could happen to my parents, it could happen to anyone. So, you know, I did. I just felt alone and I need to get my house in order because it could happen to me next.

You can't rely on what's supposed to be. Because it was so out of the ordinary. And I went back to the why, why, again. Why my parents? My aunts and uncles are all still alive. My grandparents are still alive. Why my parents? I went through a real bad blaming period of

why. It took me a long time to finally settle in it's okay. There's a reason. It's okay and I'm going to survive. My sister's going to survive and we're going to be okay. But it was a real tough time getting past that.

Well, I think it [losing my parents] definitely made me a stronger person. I was kind of like my daughter when I was her age. "Blonde," even though my hair was not blonde. If it didn't involve me, I didn't care. If the war was overseas, and it didn't touch my world, I didn't care. I wasn't big into knowing the news. I was just your typical teenager that didn't matter about things, wasn't good with directions. Just a typical "blonde." You know, you hear "blonde" jokes. But after both parents died, it was like it woke me up and I realized that things do touch my world. It does matter if there's a war overseas. It does matter which is north and south. And I think that I had a change in my life at that point in that I became more responsible. I became more aware of my surroundings.

I grew up real fast. When Dad died, Mother was upset. Reasonably so, and I felt like I had to be strong for her. Then when Mother died, I had to be strong for my sister. I didn't let myself grieve too much because I had a little sister who was 18 years old, because she was 14 when my dad died. So, she didn't grow up with a father like I did. Now, here she is a freshman in college, and she doesn't have either parent. So, I kind of turned my feelings toward her more, and I became the adult. I felt like I had to be the parent in the family now. Even though I was married. I had in-laws. I obviously was not the oldest person living. (Laughter.) But I had to be the adult. I had to grow up and I had to be the parent now for all practical purposes.

Dorothy

Dorothy is the only one of the seven women who said she did not feel like an orphan when her mother died. African American families often extend beyond traditional kinship groups. Close family friends are included in the kinship group (Collins, 2000). For

example, it is common for African American women to refer to "other mothers" and "other sisters and brothers" who are regarded as family even though they may not be related.

Dorothy was very close to her best friend's grandparents and mother. Even today Dorothy refers to her friend as her sister and the mother as her other mother.

> I grieved for my mother very hard. It wasn't, and I told someone this, I didn't actually feel like I was an adult until she died. Then I felt like I was grown up. Even though I had taken on the responsibility of the adult, I didn't feel like it until after she died.
>
> I didn't feel like I was an orphan. I didn't feel like it's just me and I'm all alone. No, I didn't ever feel that way. You know why? I think it's because I was an only child. You can be alone even around people. Yes, and we created an extended family here. I have my grandmother and my sister, two sisters, and my brother and another mother, you know. It's just really weird. But these are people that, and it's really strange… The girl, the lady that I call my sister, she and I were actually neighbors. We grew up together. I was about a year and ten months older than she was. She lived next door with her grandmother and grandfather. We grew up together, so she was my sister. Then her mother had another daughter and son and they became my sister and brother. So, it's really weird. Well, I had it [an extended family] during [my parents' lives] because they, my friend's grandmother and grandfather, were the perfect parents to me. I wanted them to be my parents, too.

Shattered Expectations

After the death of a loved one, there is a lot of activity surrounding the survivors. There is usually a funeral or graveside service and friends and family are present to give support and comfort. But afterward, there is no one. Society sends the message that within a week or so of the funeral everything should be back to normal. But "normal" is not possible. These women were faced with the business of making meaning out of their loss and finding what the new "normal" must be. Holidays can be the hardest. Survivors may be surprised at

the moments and triggers that thrust their loss into awareness. New ways of doing old traditions may be called for. Sometimes tradition is the only thing that gets the family through. The problem is you can't predict which it will be. Keep the old and find comfort, or avoid the old and create a new tradition to block the pain or heal the wound.

I asked each of the women questions about the changes they experienced after the loss of their parents. The women spoke about their feelings, not just with regard to the loss itself such as sadness, but the feelings and reactions that surfaced in their relationships with others. Several of the women felt responsible for carrying on the duties performed by one or both of their parents such as being the grandparent for nieces and nephews, being the family member now "in charge" of planning family events and celebrations or making decisions, or taking care of younger siblings. These women experienced sadness, anger, loneliness, abandonment, fear of death, fear of illness, being cheated, and feeling emotional pain deeper since losing their parents.

Studies have looked at the benefits that people may perceive they have gained after stressful events. These women also reported benefits as a result of the experience of losing their parents. Three areas of change have been described by Taylor (1983) as related to benefit-finding: personal growth/priorities, self-concept, and relationships with others. Neimeyer and Anderson (2002) describe meaning reconstruction as occurring within the contexts of "sense-making regarding the loss, benefit-finding in the experience, and identity reconstruction in its aftermath" (p. 48). The women's stories are filled with sub-themes about sense-making, benefit-finding, and the changes in their self-concept or identity reconstruction. They relate their response to perceived parental expectations, relationship challenges, changes in perspective, and finding ways to cope with their grief. The result has

been to discover a "new normal" in the aftermath of losing what they had assumed would never change (Bowman, 1999; Lester, 1995; K. Mitchell & Anderson, 1983; Parkes, 1996).

Brenda

"Emotionally, it was hard."

I had a family, of course, and Charlotte. We were close and we dealt with it, I think, together. I think it was harder on her [Charlotte] because I was here when she [Mother] was sick. I took care of her physically. Emotionally it was hard, too, for me. But I think it was harder on her because she lived so far away that she didn't feel like she was doing anything. I always thought she felt guilty. It would have been the same if it had been me. I keep trying to tell her that.

"And then I started doing it."

It's just little things. We always had Christmas at her [Mother's] house. We'd switch between Howard's mother and our house. Birthdays, she always had birthday dinners for everybody. Mother's Day, Father's Day, those sorts of things. I don't think we celebrate it anymore like that. Christmas we did, but a year after my mother died my mother-in-law got Alzheimer's. So our whole family structure was gone. And then I started doing... we started having Christmas at my house on Christmas Day. On Christmas Eve we would go to Howard's sister's. She started having the Christmas Eve because her mother always had it. So we still went there on Christmas Eve. We had Christmas at my house just for immediate family and for Charlotte and her family when they could be there. It's just not having that crutch of your parents, I think. You miss that. It's a comfort that you don't have.

"She would just show up when you needed her."

I feel I'm sure like Mother did, when you feel like the hub of everything, and I think it's probably how Mother felt. I don't know if you think about it logically, it's just kind of always there. You feel like you've got to fix everything. (Laughter.) I've got to get out of that. That's the way Mother always was. She would just show up when you needed her. I'm

not the mother she was, but I keep trying to be. I think that's important. I think a lot, "I wonder what Mother would do?" I do that.

And with Daddy too. I know we're always talking about Daddy; he was a mechanic. We're always talking about, well if Daddy was here he could do this. Howard and Bill are not mechanics. And then we think if Daddy was here he'd be almost 80. He probably couldn't do it anyway. When they die when they're young and when you're young you still have an image of them when they were young, which is good in a way.

"Then I started having real bad headaches."

I used to worry about getting a brain tumor because Mother did even though they said it wasn't hereditary. I used to worry about that. Not to where it changed or affected my life, but in the back of my mind I worried about it. Then I started having real bad headaches. So I had an MRI. Well there was nothing up there. Even though I wasn't consciously worried about it, it was a big relief to me. When I went to the neurologist about my headaches, he asked me if I had a family history of migraines. I told him that my mother had a brain tumor and that my Daddy had lung cancer but that was from smoking. I wasn't really that worried about that. It was the other that pops up for no reason.

"It's like you want to make them proud of you."

I think it's just knowing what Mother would want us to do and what Daddy would want us to do. They wouldn't want us to sit down, grieve and just... it's like you want to make them proud of you. That's part of it plus the things that you learned from them, as you get older you applied them.

Also the things that they didn't get to do you want to do. We go on a lot of trips because Mother loved to travel. Daddy had just as soon sit there and not ever go anywhere. Mother liked to travel and they were planning on traveling when they retired and they didn't get to. We do it now before we retire.

Charlotte

"It just didn't dawn on me that she would die before she was maybe 80."

One reason was because of Grandmother K., because she was forever. I knew Mother would die, especially after I got older, but still Mother was only 60 when she got sick. I just didn't think about her dying that young. Plus all of Mother's sisters were much older than her and they were all still around and active and healthy. It just didn't dawn on me that she would die before she was maybe 80. That was probably just my expectations, in her 80s. So I lost her probably 20 years before I had planned on losing her.

"We had a lot of problems in our marriage over that, because I couldn't move on."

Bill and I had a terrible time in our marriage. Part of it was my fault and part of it was his fault. He didn't want to deal with the death of my mother. He loved Mother. But he had not been raised to deal with death. His brother [Jimmy] had died several years before and he was hurt over that. It was sad. But with the death of Mother our life changed. With Jimmy it was just that we weren't going to see him anymore but he wasn't involved in our life like my mother and daddy were. He was a big part of our life but he wasn't involved in our life per se. And when Mother died he couldn't deal with it. He didn't want to deal with it. He just wanted to go on with life. He didn't want to deal with it. It made me mad. He didn't give me the kind of support that I felt like he should, because he didn't want to talk about it. He didn't want me to talk about it. He couldn't stand to see Daddy. He was closer to Daddy I think than Mother. He couldn't stand to see Daddy like he was. So he just wouldn't be around him.

Mother died in the summer and we went to Germany in October and I hadn't ever moved on. I got into the anger mode. I couldn't get past that. We had a lot of problems in our marriage over that, because I couldn't move on. I didn't feel like he was doing what he should. We had a lot of marital problems. We almost divorced over it.

I started going to see a chaplain when we were in Germany. I talked to him a lot about it and he talked to Bill. He helped me a great deal. He had lost his mother and we talked about it a lot. He pointed out some things that I was doing that was wrong.

"You can't depend on your husband to help you move on," he said. "You're going to have to do that on your own."

And then I remembered something Mother had told me.

"You have to make yourself happy and be happy with someone else, but no one else can make you happy."

At one point Bill and I were barely speaking to each other even though we lived in the same house, because I was so angry with him. I put my anger on him. He was so mad because I wasn't doing anything that he thought I should be doing. It was a very difficult time. I was going to leave. He wanted me to leave. I wanted to leave. But the chaplain wouldn't allow it.

"I've talked to you two too much," he said. "I know that you have a strong marriage, a very close love for each other. I'm not going to let you do it. I can't stop you when you get back to the States, but I can keep you from leaving here."

So through counseling with the chaplain, going to church and stuff Bill and I were able to get through that. We were in Germany for three years and we had quite a lot of trouble while we were there off and on. I don't know what really changed. I don't know what happened. Things just started to get better. Maybe I just started getting over being mad.

"When we started talking about Mother I think is when it started changing."

Then when Daddy got sick, I guess because of what happened when Mother was sick, Bill was not going to make the same mistakes he did before. I don't know, but when Daddy got sick his whole attitude was different. He was very supportive. He was there a lot no matter what I wanted to do. He was very supportive of it. Daddy was in the hospital in

Texas when we were living in Louisiana. I would drive from Louisiana to Texas. Whatever I wanted to do, he was very supportive during that time. It was entirely different when Daddy died because of that support that he gave me. I think that's one reason. He talked about it.

Then he started talking about Mother. We could talk about it and everything. Sometime I think, when we were in Germany, when we started talking about Mother I think is when it started changing. But when Daddy died he was different during that time period. And it helped a great deal. He was very supportive. And when Mother died, I'm not saying he wasn't there, he was there he just wasn't there. He could get away from us like "I've got a go to Mother's" or "I've got to go here." He was gone and he didn't want to deal with the children. He made it difficult for me because of the kids. I had to deal with the kids and stuff. But when Daddy died he was totally different. We had a different marriage when Daddy died than we did before. So it was much easier. Easier to deal with. It changed.

I don't think I was a very good mother during that time. I didn't want to deal with the kids. I wanted them to leave me alone. I wanted everybody to leave me alone. I wasn't a very good wife. I wasn't a very good mother. Sometimes I think my children suffered. I know they did. I don't know if they had any long-range effects, but I don't think I was a very good mother during that time.

Something else, too, when Bill's mother died, Bill came and apologized to Brenda and me because he said he never knew what that feeling was. Bill changed a great deal when his mother died. I know he's not involved in this, but still. It affects me. His whole personality changed. Our marriage became, even though before that we had gotten very stable, after Bill's mother died his personality changed and he became a calmer person. He told me that when he looked back on the way he behaved when Mother died he said, "I just want to slap myself." It affects people and it affected him on the relationship that we had.

And he apologized to me and he apologized to Brenda. He said he just didn't know. He loved Mother and Daddy, but he didn't know what that feeling was until then.

"Some people change to the negative. I believe in the end it applied to us in the positive."

It changed our lives when my parents died. It changed our lives when Bill's mother died, because it changed his attitude about a lot of things. It was just a different lifestyle. You became more in tune with your feelings. You had to. This person was a big part of your life and you can't ever forget them. It has a big impact. Some people change to the negative. I believe that in the end it applied to us in the positive. I didn't notice it so much until Bill's mother died. You know you start thinking about things and start putting it together and I believe it was a big positive.

Fran

"I didn't have a relationship with my mother."

As a young kid you never dream that you won't have your parents growing up. That's just not in the cards, you know. I had my grandparents. You just assume your parents are going to be there. And I guess after Dad had his stroke, everything kind of changed there anyway. He didn't want me getting married. I'd met a guy and wanted to get married. He didn't want me getting married because he didn't want grandkids, which kind of surprised me because Dad loved kids. But he finally said one day that he didn't want them seeing him that way because he was disabled, couldn't talk good. So my whole perspective of having a father in my older life changed after he had his stroke. And I guess after he died I just felt a loss as far as, I didn't have a dad anymore. I didn't… I just had a one-parent family. That just wasn't in the cards for me. He'd been my primary person and I really had a loss.

"Maybe it's made me a stronger person."

So, I missed him and I didn't understand why. I had a lot of time of "Why God? I don't understand why you took my dad." But I know there's a reason. As I've grown older I

know there's a reason, for whatever reason. Maybe it's because it made me a stronger person. I don't know. Well, I think it definitely made me a stronger person.

I think just getting to know my mother [was a positive result]. And I've even thought later maybe that's why God allowed that to happen, so that I would get to know my mother. Because if Dad hadn't died, and we'd all grown old, I might never have gotten to know my mother the way I did. It forced me to have conversations with my mother. Not that we didn't, but we didn't have deep conversations. So, it forced me to get to know my mother better. If there's a reason that God wants me to know this side of heaven, then maybe that was the reason. It forced me to get to know my mother.

"The wound's always there."

(Sigh.) I don't know if I have [made sense of losing Marian] yet. I don't know that I have yet. I don't understand it. She's younger than Wallace. He's three years older than her. He's still here. I don't think I've put it behind me. And there's times I haven't even put my parents behind me and that's been 25 and 30 years ago. But yeah, people think get over it. But no, you don't ever get over it. And the old saying, time heals, it does, but then again, it doesn't. I used to hate hearing that. People would say, "Time will heal, honey. It'll heal." It would make me so mad. They're right in one sense. It does. The hurt gets less, but it never heals. The wound's always there. The scar's always there.

Certain times, I know years after my mother died, probably three or four years, Kevin would find me crying in the kitchen.

"What is wrong?"

"I just miss my Mom."

And he didn't understand. He hadn't lost a parent at that point. He had both his parents. And you could see the look in his eyes, kind of like "Gosh. It's been four years Fran."

But something triggered me. Something. Some little memory. And it always seemed to be in the kitchen that it happened. So I don't know if something cooking or smell, maybe something triggered the smell. I don't know, but it was always in the kitchen that I'd just start bawling. I've done that over his mother. And in this house especially. I turn a corner and expect her to be there. And it's like, she's not there. So I've had a really hard time. We've gone through a lot living here. I'll turn a corner and expect to see her and have to catch myself. I've ended up in tears many times. Well, obviously, I'm on antidepressants right now and getting counseling.

"God, please don't let me die early."

It's left my kids no grandmother now. They didn't know my mother. Now they have no grandmother and they're neither one married. So, they're never going to have a grandmother on that end and I guess that's what scares me most is that. God please don't let me die early. Don't take me away from my kids. Not that I'm scared and not that I don't want to go. I'm ready. But I'd just as soon it be the Rapture and we all go together, because I don't want to leave them.

I think sometimes I have felt like a hypochondriac because every little ailment, I run to the doctor. Dad's was a blood clot in his brain. Mother's was a blood clot between her heart and her lung. Marian had colon cancer. So every little thing, I feel like I'm running to the doctor. So, yeah, I think I try [to do things to stay healthy]. Obviously I need to lose some weight. I have a hard time. That's a mental issue. I can't seem to get my rear in gear to get it done. But, yeah, I think I do try to take care more. Maybe obsessed a little too much sometimes.

We are vulnerable. Yeah. We're not immortal, which God never said we were and I understand that. We [think we] can do it tomorrow. We'll have time to do that when we retire. Well, that may never come. I think I'm more aware of that. I need to do things now that I want to do because it may never come around again. That time may not come. I may

not be around. They may not be around. I think I've realized that people die, and I know that, but you don't realize it in that degree until you've lost someone really close. And then it makes you realize that they may not be here. You can't do it tomorrow. You better do it today if you want to do it.

[People think] it can't happen to them. But it can. Even though I've been through a traumatic time, and I have, you ought to talk to my sister because she lost her dad at 14 and her mom at 18. She, by the time she was 18 years old, was an orphan, basically. She lived with us for a year and a half. At one point I had my 3-year-old daughter in the same bed with my 20-year-old sister and my infant son was in a crib in the same bedroom. I had three kids for a while. I really did. We treated her as our child and… now she didn't ask permission to do things and it wasn't like that, but Christmases came around, we bought for three kids. Birthdays came around; we bought for three kids. I was all she had. She came home to my house.

We just got back from Helen's house. I don't feel like I'm going home. We didn't go home. We went to visit my sister and her family. But when she comes here, this is home. I guess that's why I like being in this house so much because this was Kevin's home and this was what everybody thought of as the family home. So I think it's fitting we're in this home. My sister-in-law can't get past that. I know that's why she won't come in, but she's got to get past it. And I guess I want to shake her and say, "Listen to me. I've been through it. If I can get through it, as hard as it's been, twice, you can get through it."

"…you grow up, you get married, you have kids, you go to grandma and grandpa's on holidays."

Well, you know it's a fairy tale. When you're a little bitty kid, you grow up, you get married, you have kids, you go to grandma and grandpa's on holidays. We didn't have grandma and grandpa's to go to. You know I laugh. I tell my husband, "You had it good. You didn't have to go to the in-law's every other holiday. You didn't have in-laws to go to." And I laughingly say that, but you know, it's true. We never had to worry about, this holiday

you go to here, this holiday you go… so I hope when it comes to my kids I'm understanding that they've got to go to their husband's or wife's because I didn't have to deal with that. We were always together. That's something I'm going to have to work on with my children's spouses.

"I've felt driven to be a perfectionist in everything I did."

It's definitely changed my life. I don't know how my life would've been different if they'd lived, I don't guess I'll ever know. I might never have accomplished the things in my life that I've accomplished. My dad was a perfectionist. He taught me to be a perfectionist, but I never got to that point until I lost my mom. After Mom died, that's when the perfectionism kicked in. Not that I'm perfect, but striving to be, and I even got so bad that it was stressing me out. So I backed off from that. I learned it's okay not to be perfect. It's okay if things aren't perfect, but there was a point there, probably 20 years after Mom died, that I thought everything had to be perfect. That's what Dad expected. When I was growing up he always told me, "When you have a home of your own, don't keep it like your mom. Don't leave the house messy. Clean it up. Your husband wants to see a clean house." Daddy was used to that because his mom stayed home. She didn't work. There's times I make myself think, "My kids don't care if my house is clean or not." That was just his quirk. It's nice to have it clean, but… I like the poem about, they're not going to remember if the house is clean or not, they're just going to remember if you're there. I've always been there for my kids.

I felt driven to be a perfectionist in everything I did. And I think what made me stop that, I got counted off on an evaluation at work one time. My boss marked me high because he said, "When you do something I know it's done right. I don't have to worry about how it's done," he said. "But I'm marking you low because you take too long to do it. Your first try is better than someone else's third try. But you go ahead and do it three times until you've got it perfect. Do it the first time and leave it alone." He marked me high and he

marked me low. And that was the start of my seeing well, maybe I do need to back off. I'm real hard on myself, even still. I'm real hard. I don't think I can sing. I don't think I can do anything well, because it's not perfect. And, there again, I know deep down that I can do it just as well as other people. It doesn't have to be perfect.

I have them on a pedestal. They did everything perfect. They died when I was so young and that's how you still think of your parents at 18 and 23. Everything they did was perfect. So that's all I have to match up to.

Evelyn

"I've always been so sad that my children didn't have that."

I think it always impacts me. My mother is always with me in the essence of her. And I lost her when I was really very young. It's been really hard for me with my own children because my mother was a terrific grandmother and if you listen to the grandkids who knew her talk about her, she had such an impact on their lives. They talk about the things that she did. They've written stories about her and various things. I've always been so sad that my children didn't have that. Now they had a great grandmother. Mrs. W. was just amazing and they adored her so much. But my mother would have been so awed by those two little girls that I feel like there's still that vacancy there that I didn't get to share that with her. I had a terrific mother-in-law who stepped in, but still that's not your mother.

It's like home's not there. It's like there was no home to go to. There was no place to take those children that would've been my home, my mother, to share them. I think sometimes I laughed when my kids were teenagers and they were dating and Mother and Daddy lived through that, and I lived through it also, and I would laugh at my reaction to things because I would think, well that's what they were thinking, that's what they were doing at that particular time.

At this point in my life what I think about is Mother only lived 8 years longer than I am old. When I was 27 and she was ill, 26, 27 when she was ill, I thought well, she's old.

And now I know that my mother was not old. And that she could have contributed a lot more. So, I think about that now a lot because I think what would happen if I were gone at 66, which is a very short time from now. It certainly affects the way you look at aging I think. However, my mother will never be old.

"And the woman he married didn't care for me… and wasn't welcoming…"

It was a totally different experience. I think his being 93 had a lot to do with it. I think that the fact that he married shortly after Mother died. It was a year later that he married. And the woman that he married didn't care for me a lot and wasn't welcoming so that I wanted to come home. My father smoked, she smoked. I didn't want my children in that because generally if we did go they'd end up sick. They didn't just smoke a little; they smoked continuously. So it was really hard.

Dorothy

"It was bad enough having to live with my mother again,…"

My sons had always been my priority. I put my sons before myself. We lived in the school district of a suburban city because I didn't want them in the metropolitan area's district. It had changed so much from the time I was actually in public school. We actually lived here [college town] when they began school and kindergarten. We moved back to the City, but we moved far northwest so they would be in the suburban district. The thought of me having, it was bad enough for me to have to live with my mother again, but to have to put my kids in the larger school district was more than I could just want to…

And they started eighth grade in [the larger district], but thank God they had enough of a good start that it didn't hurt them. Didn't help very much, but it didn't hurt them. (Laughter.)

Angela

"I became aware of my mother."

Our lives changed dramatically. We went from... the day after he died we were going to build a new four-bedroom home behind a fraternity next to Kent State University. We were going to be living an upper middle-class, a very upper middle-class life, is what we were destined to do. The day he died we went on Social Security. My mother got a minimum wage job at a bank.

I became aware of my mother. She had not been real important in my life. I turned to her when I needed an advocate, and a lot of times I did. Sometimes my dad was the advocate for me with my mother. He had the power. And that didn't change for me for a long, long time. I think that my relationship with my mother was damaged from early teen hood because of not having, I don't know... things weren't in balance. It was dysfunctional. I was both afraid and very eager to do what I thought would be pleasing and to keep the peace. But when I lost that person...

I'm reminded of the story about a guy who was a farmer and his wife was really practical. He would plant a patch of sweet peas because they were so colorful. He tried to get her to let him plant the fields with sweet peas so they could sit on the porch and look at the sweet peas bloom in all colors in the spring. She insisted that they make money. The way that he vented, at harvest time he'd go into town and get drunk and go to a brothel and spend his weekend. Then he'd go back and be the responsible, reliable guy. The year his wife died he planted every square foot in sweet peas and sat on the porch and watched them. Then he went back to the brothel and did exactly the same thing. Some guy said, "Why did you do that?" And he said, "You know, she worried me to death about those sweet peas all spring long." But I think I was the same way. Even though the person wasn't there anymore all the ideas were still planted.

I was still reacting and I reacted to my mother in ways that were really a reaction to my dad. He had said something to me once, "When you're 18 I expect you to be out on your own." I was shocked by that because I had expected to go to college and be at home until I graduated from college. And he probably said it in a fit of temper and he probably said it because that was what life was like for him when he was growing up. He didn't really mean it, but when I was 18 I thought I should leave home. It was a lot of the reason why I dropped out of school and joined VISTA. I thought I should be responsible for myself. I didn't belong at home. It was a hard thing that I did to my family because there was one less person that they got Social Security money for. That didn't register on me. All I was thinking was I gotta take care myself and this is a way to do that. I was using up money going to school. I considered myself a burden. I never ever said that. I went my whole life without explaining why I did that. But it was a hurtful thing that I did and it was also something that changed my life and something I thought that I had to do it, that I was responsible for myself. I was being my dad. And I was also fulfilling expectations that he had for me.

When I finished the year, I came back and returned to college. That was a confusing time for me. It was an identity kind of crisis because I spent a semester at the university and enrolled in science courses and worked in the biochemistry lab. I focused on being a biochemist. I was unprepared for the classes. I hadn't had the proper chemistry background to be in the kind of classes I was enrolled in. My ACT didn't fit my actual preparation. Yet they placed me in these advanced classes because of my scores and didn't pay attention to my transcript. I didn't know enough to do anything about it. I wasn't succeeding and I always succeeded and succeeded at a high level. I wasn't happy doing it. I asked for help. I worked for a biochemist. They just dismissed me.

"Oh, you're bright, you're smart. You can do this," they said.

What I needed was for somebody to say, "Look, this is how this works and if you understand how this formula and what this means.... "

But I couldn't get anybody to pay any attention to me. I couldn't get any help and I didn't know what else to do. I just kept struggling along and was miserable. After that semester I quit school and move to [the city] intending to just work and try to decide what I wanted to do. I prayed. And my answer to prayer was what I had always said that I wanted to. What I like to do is write. I could make a living writing by becoming a journalist. From then on that's what I studied, that's what I did, what I wanted to do to be a newspaper reporter and write.

"I felt relief that I was able to let go of it."

Well, I didn't know that at the time that was why I was doing it. I only realized that later that that's why I was doing it, much later. I felt relief that I was able to let go of it. At the time, I remember clearly how I evaluated it. To me it was a choice between should I do the highest thing that I'm capable of doing, the most challenging intellectual work, or shall I do something that I might find, that's enjoyable to me, which is a creative thing. Then there's another little thing in here, going down this road, I'd wanted to be an artist in high school. I wanted to go to art school. I wanted to do sculpting, drawing, and painting. My mother blocked that.

"You can't make a living doing that," she said. "That's fine for your interests, yeah, I know you like doing it, but you can't make a living doing that. That's not what you're going to college for."

So I blocked that one out. She kept wanting me to be a teacher and all I could imagine as a teacher was grade school because that's what I knew about. I can vaguely recall a couple of people mentioning to me you know there's college teaching. But I couldn't see myself doing that. No one said to me, "I can see you being an excellent college teacher and this is what you need to do to do it." It was mentioned, mentioned with me in mind, but not

in a way that I was able to make that leap to see it was something that I could do. I didn't know enough about those kinds of majors. The choice was between something I had declared in junior high – writing – or doing something in science because it was challenging and a great calling to be able to do something in the medical field.

It wasn't until much, much later that I realized that that was one of the strong ways of identifying with my dad and not identifying with my mother. I would have been a terrific teacher. I had a lot of opportunities to go into teaching and exposure and things that I did well that were in teaching and I left them. I dismissed them. I'm only doing this temporarily so I can make some money so I can go into this other. Basically what I'm telling you is I was a conflicted young person and now I'm an old person who knows I was a conflicted young person.

Children and Loss

Losing one parent during childhood is stressful; losing both parents violently and suffering personal trauma at the same time impacts the child's development. Numerous problems may appear, not only during the remainder of childhood, but throughout adulthood as well.

> Bereavement in childhood may impact on development; much will depend on the continuity and security of the child's life, and whether they will be supported in their adaptation. Particularly stressful to the child is the death of a parent and this may lead to subsequent vulnerabilities in childhood, adolescence, or adult life. These may include risk of depression (Brown, Harris, & Copeland, 1977; Van Eerdewegh, Clayton, & Van Eerdewegh, 1985), antisocial behaviors, early pregnancy, and difficulties in attachment (Main, 1985). Surviving parents may not recognize the child's grief and loss, because of immersion in their own stress. This, plus family insecurity, may mean the child's issues are unresolved. (Raphael & Dobson, 2000, p. 47)

Greta's entire life was upended. She was separated from her brother and placed with her mother's cousin. Greta's loss, because of its graphic nature, was news. In an effort to protect her, family members decided Greta's rape would not be publicly disclosed.

Unfortunately, it appears they also chose to never speak about it privately either. Greta did not indicate if she received any type of counseling or professional support to help her deal with her rape or the violent loss of her parents. She said she felt like a stranger in her cousin's home. Her guardians would not allow Greta to continue doing any of the activities she had engaged in with her mother, such as entering pageants. Greta felt that in many ways she was now on her own. She speaks of loneliness as a child and of not being understood then or now. Without the continuity of "affectional bonds" and support it is difficult for children to deal with the loss of any family member (Raphael & Dobson, 2000; Worden, 1991).

Greta

"I don't have a mom to call or a dad to call or anything…"

> I think initially it was more just a survival mode. I think I did not start dealing with a lot of it until my late twenties. Because you know you just kind of, you miss (tears) all the stuff that you missed like graduation and kids and so, then you start going "I don't have a mom to call or a dad to call or anything like that." So you know….

"That was a time when I needed somebody the most."

> That's the time in my life where everybody was like, oh she's married. She's gone on. We don't need to worry about her any more. That was a time in my life when I needed somebody the most. People don't realize that. And it's been hard because I've lost all my grandparents and everything, over the last 10 years, so it's kind of like I'm here. And I have my brother and he's got his own life and they have a baby on the way and all that kind of stuff. And he wants me to live his life and not my life. And there's a lot of things that, like I said, I've gone through that he hasn't gone through and vice versa. But that's when it became hard for me, as I got older.

"She knew exactly what my wedding was going to look like."

My mom had my wedding planned from the time I was 12 years old. She knew exactly what my wedding was going to look like. She didn't know who I was going to marry, but… And I don't know that she was actually ever happy. According to my aunt, she wasn't because she'd been accepted to Julliard. She was an ACT scholar. It was like one of those things that there were a lot of things she didn't get to do in life.

Here she married the preacher she met at church camp. That whole scenario. Yes, with my dad being a preacher, I mean, yeah, his focus was on family and family counseling and so I heard a lot of it. It was weird. At 12 years old I heard that you have this seven-year itch, or six to seven years, where you don't know why you're married and you're not happy. So I knew when that six years came, I was like, it's okay. You go through this. Okay, a 12 year old should not be, even at that age I shouldn't be remembering that stuff from 12. But those things that you knew would be good advice for later on down the line in your life. The only reason you would ever get divorced is because this, this, this.

"And you can't explain that loneliness to anybody."

I mean, you know the type of person you're looking for and all that. And like I said, my parents probably would've let me see the ways of whoever I went out with and I would've made better choices. But when you're out there feeling so alone. And you can't explain that loneliness to anybody. All they're like, well they died three or four years ago what's your problem? Get over it. It's like, no. You don't get it. And being at such a young age, I've always been very independent. I always feel like I've had to take care of myself and it's been real hard.

"I was living with people who said no, that was your life then. It's not anymore."

My brother wanted me to be a rebel. "Well if you want to be in pageants, you can be in pageants." But then I was living with people who said no, that was your life then. It's not any more. So they took away a lot. My brother was off living his own life and dealing with

the stress of losing Mom and Dad in his own way, which I didn't know a lot of it until later on. Bouncing from college to college. He actually just lived with some friends because he only had that one semester left in school and he needed to stay there to finish his senior year. Then he pretty much went off and did whatever he's going to do.

"At this point I really don't have any expectations because… you never know how life's going to change.

I remember last year saying [to my children], "Today I'm the as old as my mom was when she died. What would you think if I died?"

"Oh, Mom, that would be bad."

"Ya'll are at the same age and I'm at the same age. What would that be like?"

"I can't imagine that," they said.

So my drive is, I've always been, you don't want anything to happen to you because you don't want them to live with their dad. So, to me at this point I really don't have any expectations because you never know. You never know how life's going to change.

You never know. You just kind of… It gives you a lot of, oh what am I saying, it gives you a lot of issues. I didn't get a job last year based on what I looked like, believe it or not. I was like, this is amazing. You're raped when you're 13, and I've had other things. I've been stalked by somebody. I've been… all this stuff through life and how much more can I possibly take? How much in life? And people see this outside person, but nobody wants to see the inside. (Tears.)

New Identities – New Roles

Six of the women in this study were surprised to discover they felt like orphans after the second parent died. The feeling I was now alone in the world came as a big surprise to me when my mother died. I knew that I had a husband, a sister, and a strong supportive extended family, but my life was irrevocably changed by the loss of my parents. I did not realize, nor did many of the women in this study, that my identity was closely tied to my role as child in relationship with my parents. All of the women in this study were now faced with

the reality that they were the "adult" in what had been their family of origin. This new role was surprising in that we all thought we were adults prior to the death of our parents simply because we were fulfilling adult responsibilities at home, at work, and in our communities.

This change in the perception of our roles was only one part of the shattered expectations we experience when our parents die. The women in this study found themselves taking on many unexpected roles such as surrogate grandmother for nieces and nephews, surrogate parent for younger siblings, and being the one now in charge of family events and plans.

Additionally, the women told stories about benefits they discovered after the death of their parents. Benefits included stronger marriages, finally "growing up," becoming a stronger person, getting know the other parent, letting go of parental expectations to follow their own dreams and goals, and greater appreciation of family. The importance of family and friends was a strong theme running through all of the women's stories. The presence or absence of a support system comprised of family and/or friends seems to have a strong influence on how well these women were able to move through the grief process.

CHAPTER FIVE – IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

Meaning-Making in the Context of Relationships

Marsha - 1994

My mother's side of the family is great when it comes to big events like illness and funerals. Even my second cousins, who are now in their thirties, know what to do when one of the family is in the hospital or dies. I know who I am within the context of this family, especially during times of crisis. Marriage can be a great way to bring new people into our family circle. But sometimes it seems marriage is more about realizing your family's rituals and traditions aren't compatible with his upbringing, at least that's been my experience with my second husband. Roger's parents died when he was in his twenties and his first wife was murdered before she turned 30. I thought he would be the most supportive person surrounding me when my father died. I couldn't have been more wrong.

After I learned that Daddy had died, I began planning our trip to Texas.

"Okay, let's see," I said. "I've got to pick up my check from work so I'll have some money for the trip. And I'll call the airline to make reservations for us."

"What about the cats?" Roger asked. "Reba's out of town and Joan is ill." These were our cat-sitter friends who knew our three cats and didn't mind coming over to care for them.

"I guess we'll just have to board them." I crossed to the kitchen telephone, intent on finding our seldom-used telephone directory.

"I can't afford to board three cats," he said. "And the airfare is going to be terrible if we have to pay full price."

"They have some sort of reduced fare for people who have to fly for funerals."

"Maybe, but I still can't afford to board the cats. How long do you think we'll have to be gone?"

"I don't know." My patience was wearing thin. "We get there tonight or tomorrow. The funeral won't be any sooner than Thursday or Friday. Friday probably since my birthday is Thursday. We'll need to stay a couple more days. I guess we can be back by Sunday or Monday."

"That's going to be way too expensive. I can't go."

"Look!" I screamed. "There's no question about going or not going. It doesn't matter how much it costs to board the cats. We are going."

I later regretted my emphasis on "we." He complained about the cost for boarding the cats and the cost of the plane tickets to anyone unlucky enough to be within earshot. After the funeral, Mother and I sat in the living room talking about Daddy's death, the funeral, and all the events before and after. Roger came in and asked me to get him something to eat. My brother-in-law stepped in and said he would take care of it.

"It's really boring," Roger said. "Can we go to mall or something?"

"No," I said. "We can't go to the mall. I'm here with my mother."

"But all you're doing is talking about the same stuff over and over."

"I'm sorry if you're bored, but that's what we do in this family. We sit and we talk."

He turned and headed back to the bedroom. I sighed. We were having problems in our marriage. This only magnified them.

"You know, honey," Mother said, "I'll understand if you decide to get a divorce. It's okay."

1996

A year and a half later Mother died. I immediately called Roger to tell him she was gone.

"When can you get here?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm not coming."

"What?"

"I said goodbye when I saw her Thanksgiving, so I'm not coming."

"It's not about her. I need you here."

"Well, I can't afford to fly down there."

"I really do need you here. I'll pay for your ticket." As soon as I said the words, I knew I'd be better off without him here.

"Okay. I'll come," he whined.

"No. Don't come. I don't want you to now."

"Never mind. I'm coming." He hung up the phone.

I regretted ever calling him. He complained from the time he walked into my sister's home. He wanted to fly back to Virginia immediately after the funeral. The airport was two hours away. He asked my sister if her husband would drive him there after the service.

"No, he can't," she said. "I need him with me. If you have to leave then, you'll have to find your own ride back."

He managed to get Mother's former neighbor to drive him to the Dallas airport. Despite his best efforts to get out of Texas, his flight was cancelled and he spent the night in a chapel at the airport. I stayed on another week. Regina needed me. She was emotionally and physically spent after caring for Mother for over a year, working fulltime, and raising three small boys.

When I got back home, I realized within a week that this marriage was never going to work. I knew Roger would never be there for me when I needed him. I'd rather be on my own. By April I moved out. The divorce was final a year later.

1997

In June 1997 I was offered a teaching position at a regional university in Oklahoma. The town was only 175 miles from my sister's home in Texas. Perfect. I packed my belongings and made my plans to move. My brother-in-law flew up and helped me drive the rented moving van cross-country with my two cats sitting between us, and my car in tow. I thought I was moving to be nearer to Regina because I believed she needed

me. I, more than anything, needed to be closer to her and the rest of my family. I felt drained and depressed. Being close to my family meant my own healing and recovery could begin. I couldn't do it alone.

The Need for Family Support

The death of a loved one, especially a parent, affects not only surviving children, but also extended family members. The presence or absence of a support system of family and friends influences an individual's response to such loss. It is often within the context of family that survivors begin to make sense of the circumstances surrounding a death and ways are found to continue having a relationship to the deceased in our life. According to Nadeau (1997) a great deal of meaning-making occurs within the context of family relationships. "When a person dies, families have a story to tell about the events surrounding the death, and such stories are laden with meaning" (p. 95).

This chapter looks at the importance of family to the women in this study. Some women come from large supportive families, others from families they did not feel close to, and some felt they had no family support or connection at all. Family and friends, or the lack thereof, made an impact on how each of these women responded to the loss of their parents.

Brenda and Charlotte come from a family rich in traditions and rituals for just about every event that the family may face, i.e., births, deaths, funerals, illness, surgery, etc. They each find their identities rooted in family. They related stories about their parents, as well as aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents and the importance of their extended family especially during and after the deaths of their parents. Their father's side of the family gathers every Thanksgiving at Charlotte's home. Their mother's family has a reunion on Labor Day each year. They have changed how they celebrate Christmas, which had been focused on celebrations with their parents. The Fourth of July has become an important

alternate holiday for the sisters and their immediate families. Traditions and rituals help individuals and family work through transitions that loss and other stressful events bring about (McGoldrick, 1991). Rituals provide a means to connect with our past, and know who we are now in light of the changes that have occurred (McGoldrick, 1991; Roberts, 1988).

Brenda

"You want to know what you were like as a child…"

When our second parent dies we lose more than we realize – we lose access to who we were as children. Very few people have known us since infancy. There's often no one to ask for clarification of a hazy childhood memory. Family relationships and family friendships are ways to connect to our earlier selves. For example, after his parents died, my husband enjoyed visiting the church he grew up in because there were older members who remembered teaching him when he was a little boy. He enjoyed hearing the stories they would tell about him, as well as stories they would tell about his parents. Brenda is close to both sides of her family. She enjoys spending time with her aunts and uncles because they provide a connection to not only her parents, but to her childhood as well.

> And you're envious of people our age. "What are you going to do this holiday?" "Oh, go to my parents." You miss them then. And your sister and your parents are someone who knows you inside out from the day you were born until whenever. If you don't have anybody like that you don't have anything to pick up the strings of your life. As you get older that's important. You want to know what you were like when you were a child because you remember things one way and some things you can't remember. I like to hear stories about Mother and Daddy from before we were ever born. I used to like to hear Mother and Daddy and Jonah and Sarah sit around and talk when they would be playing Forty-two. We were intertwined because we were all double [Lonnie and Sarah were brother and sister and Iris and Jonah were brother and sister]. They would laugh and they would

talk. They would talk about what they used to do. "Do you remember when we did this or did that?" We used to love to sit and listen. We were fortunate though because we had lots of aunts and uncles that grew up with them on both sides that were close to them and we were lucky to have a grandmother who lived as old as she was.

"I feel sorry for the people who are only children."

Daddy was really funny because sometimes he would get so mad at us because he just couldn't understand why we did what we did. But, it was always funny now looking back, it wasn't too funny then but it's funny now. We finally learned that if Daddy got really mad he would buy us something. I really feel sorry for people who are only children. Maybe for them they've never known anything else and maybe that's why it may not bother them but to me it would be a sad, sad thing to me. Mother had five brothers and sisters and so did Daddy.

All of my cousins and everybody used to come over to our house. A lot of them had big families, especially on Mother's side of the family, and they had chores to do. Well, Mother never made us do chores and if we did we didn't have to do it when we had company. So they loved to come over our house. And Daddy was a big cut up, a big tease and he liked to tease them and play practical jokes on them and things like that. It was just a good family feeling. I think that's what's carried over. She had a real sense of humor.

Her characteristics and Daddy's, too, were carried over. I think one thing that kind of gets you through bad situations is humor. I think that they had humor and our whole family did. They would lean on each other, the family members, brothers, sisters. And that's carried over to our family even though it's much smaller. It's made a lot of difference. I think it's come down even to our kids and to our grandkids, as they are getting older. I don't know how the grandkids will be but I hope they'll be that way.

"We never thought about not loving our sisters, brothers, and cousins."

The extended family celebrates Thanksgiving each year at Charlotte's home. This tradition began in Grandmother K.'s home with the return of her children and grandchildren. It has grown from 12 children and spouses and 14 grandchildren to over 70. This past Thanksgiving over 50 family members and friends attended. Aunts, uncles, cousins and spouses, second cousins and spouses and children all gather each year. The grandparents and five of the aunts and uncles are deceased, but they are remembered and are part reunion in the stories that are told and retold.

> It's important. It's not just important because we all enjoy it so much, but it's important to keep people together at least once a year. Especially when you've lost most of the older people who usually kept you together like your parents and grandparents. And we're lucky to still have some young aunts and uncles. They probably don't remember a lot more than we do. (Laughter.)
>
> We never thought about not loving our sisters, brothers, cousins... you know I've got some cousins that I think maybe haven't done exactly right and have had some pretty bad problems but that didn't mean I didn't love them. I think now families don't appreciate their history and background. I'm hopeful that it's coming back but there's been a whole line or group of people been left out.
>
> When we were growing up Mother would tell us, you know how sisters fight, "You two are all you've got so you better get along." We didn't understand at the time. But we never did fight to where we didn't care about each other. Charlotte used to tell on me sometimes and then I'd get a spanking. I really needed a spanking because I had done it. And then she'd cry because I was getting a spanking.
>
> She would say, "I didn't think you'd get a spanking."
>
> "You knew I'd get a spanking."

It's just weird little stuff like that that made us closer, not because we had to, but just because Mother encouraged us to. And she never told us, "go tell her you're sorry" or "go kiss and make up."

She'd just say, "Y'all just go sit down a little bit. You get over here and you get over here and y'all just think about a little while."

And we would and then we'd be up playing. I'm thankful for Charlotte. I think it might be harder to lose her than either Mother or Daddy at this point in my life.

"You cannot get away from this family …even if you get real busy and wrapped up in your life."

Rituals and traditions are important to Brenda and her family. These traditions provide a context for the events that occur. Brenda did not realize the family even had traditions and rituals until she was older and her nieces, nephews, and second cousins became adults. That's when she saw these younger family members carrying on the family's way of doing things. Traditions and rituals help families find meaning in losses and in gains. It's a way of preserving memories and passing them down to the next generation. Brenda knows she always has a place in this family. Even though her parents are gone, she will never be alone.

I didn't realize how many traditions we have until I started [noticing] my cousin's daughter. She's very good at doing things the way we do them. I think ours is the old-fashioned way of doing funerals and family get-together's. Some families don't even have those rituals. No one is there to take over and show them. Maybe it's because families are so scattered now.

It's important that the kids (and grandkids) have those memories. You've got to have a constant in your life if it's a house or person, a place or thing, something, just like our Thanksgiving thing [on Daddy's side of the family]. On Mother's side of the family how we have a Labor Day thing. It's a certain time of the year and everybody knows we're going to

have it. You come and we want you to come. Another thing, too, is both sides of our family, Mother's family I know and Daddy's family, they've always interacted. We've lived in the same area but they've always interacted. If anybody ever shows up at anything... they've always been around and helped. You cannot get away from this family no matter how hard you try because they'll come and get you sooner or later. Or sooner or later you'll come back. Even if you get real busy and wrapped up in your own life.

"But you go back every time and you mention something about the past, always. Because it's always there. It's a connecting thing."

Remembering and telling stories about the deceased are often used to help survivors and family members cope with loss. Remembering the past is important. Families jointly tell stories about the deceased's life, as well as their death. According to McGoldrick:

> Such sharing helps families integrate the loss experience into their lives by promoting their sense of familial, cultural, and human continuity and connectedness and empowering them to regain a sense of themselves as moving in time from the past, through the present, and into the future. (1991, p. 54)

Brenda and Charlotte's family use storytelling to remember, laugh, and tell younger family members about their parents and other family members who have died. "It seems important for families to be free to remember as well as let go of memories. Clarifying and elaborating stories and narratives about their history are ways to promote this resolution" (McGoldrick, 1991, p. 55).

One time when Mother was sick and she didn't have any hair because of all the radiation, we had bought her a wig. Howard had bought her a wig and it was pretty. We had this thing at her niece's. They had a money tree that they were giving her because she had a lot of medical expenses. All of my cousins were in there playing instruments. One of her nephews [Lloyd] is kind of bald. She was sitting there listening and she pulled her wig often threw it at Lloyd and said, "Here, Lloyd. You need this worse than I do." She still had a little bit of her humor and it thrilled everybody to death because she was still teasing. It's

good. The last funeral we went to, for my cousin who was 40-something, all of the other cousins were there, and it's so much fun to talk to them. You always talk about what they're doing now and about their kids and grandkids. But, you go back every time and you mention something about the past, always. Because it's always there. It's a connecting thing.

Charlotte

"I think, how can you live without your cousins and aunts and uncles?"

Brenda and I have talked about it so much. I don't know that I could make it without my extended family. I don't know that I could live without my extended family even though we may not see each other much. I just don't know, people talk about it and I think how can you live without your cousins and your aunts and uncles? [My aunt Mary] was a big help to me when Mother died. I'll never forget the first year after Daddy died. Brenda and Howard and their kids came to our house in Louisiana the first Christmas after Daddy died without Mother or Daddy either one. [Aunt Mary] bought Brenda and me a gift. That's the first time I could remember since we were children, because we didn't exchange gifts, but she bought Brenda and me a gift that year. I still have it hanging in my kitchen. It was just a little something and she didn't have to write a card, she didn't have to write a letter, I just knew why she was giving us that little gift that year. That was very special to us because I knew the reason she gave it. It's very special to me and like I said that duck has been hanging in my kitchen and it will hang there all my life because it was done out of pure love.

When Mother was sick Jonah and Sarah were just my anchor because Brenda was dealing with it herself. She had her family and children to deal with. Even though we were very close we had all this other stuff to deal with. And Jonah and Sarah were my anchor. They kept the kids for me all the time, which allowed me to go back and forth to the hospital. And they kept me anchored during that time. They were very special. Grandmother and Granddaddy K. and Aunt Mary and Uncle William [were also supportive]. I had some problems with the other side of the family but Brenda and I have said very often

that when Mother died it seemed that the K. side of the family [father's family] gave us the kind of support we needed more than Mother's family. I love them very much, don't get me wrong when I say this, but they just seem to be, and I understand they were hurt over Mother too, but it always seemed the K. side of the family gave us the support that we needed.

"It's very important to me for our family to get together."

The rituals that we always have and everything have been very important to us. Important to me. And that's just like Thanksgiving. It's very important to me for our family to get together. On the R. side of the family [mother's side] it's always important for us cousins to get together at least once a year and do what our parents always did. It's very important for us to do that. Our parents, my aunts and uncles, any time there was any sickness in the family they always bound together and helped that person. And I feel like we try to keep that alive. We like to do the same things that Mother and Daddy did at Christmas and stuff like that and Thanksgiving. The rituals are very important.

Family was always very important to Mother and Daddy. They liked for all of us to be together all the time. The kids know that. They like to be together. Christmas is still a sad time for us. I don't know why after all these years, Christmas is still a sad time for us. But the Fourth of July is a real happy time, and I don't know what the difference is. Here Christmas is this big holiday, and I don't know why but the kids associate the Fourth of July with my parents. It was a very happy time. And they continue that tradition. We've been home 15 years and every year they are at my house on the Fourth of July. And like I said, Laura and the others always come. But Anthony, [my nephew], there's been two years that they've been on vacation and they left and came home to be here on the Fourth of July. Last year Alan, [my son], was [out of state]. Brenda and Howard were on vacation. My daughter was off on a trip. Anthony, [my nephew], was right here on the Fourth of July. I think it's tradition. They like to do things the way Mother and Daddy did them, holidays and

things like that. They like those traditions. If Brenda and I forget, they'll remind us about it. It's nice.

Greta

"She just ended up being somebody I lived with."

Greta lost more than just her parents when they died. She lost the support of family and friends. She was not able to form any close attachments with adults or peers. The adults in her life decided she should live with her mother's cousin who was busy raising her own family at the time. This created many difficulties for Greta.

> The loss of a parent or primary caretaker presents the most difficult challenge. Central caretaking functions must be assumed by someone else. Filling the emotional loss of the parent is still another matter. Sometimes an uncle, aunt, or grandparent can fill in the gap. If resources are unavailable, the loss will be greatly compounded. (McGoldrick, 1991, pp. 51-52)

This situation may have contributed to many of the problems Greta faced as an adult (McGoldrick, 1991). From Greta's perspective, there were no adults in her life who helped her deal with and make sense of the loss of her parents.

> I ended up living with my mom's first cousin. It was really strange because she had a daughter that was seven years older than I was. She was just getting married at 19 or 20. And there was some jealousy because I was in the house and she wasn't getting all the attention now and she'd been the baby. Quite honestly, she [her mother's cousin] just ended up being somebody I lived with. There was not… what I felt mostly was "I had to do this. I had to do that. I had to make certain grades. I had to, you know…" I just felt like it was just a place where I had a lot of rules. There was never any, I always felt like an outsider. There was never a developing that close relationship that you would with a mom because I was constantly being judged. I couldn't do things right or a specific way. It's been in the last two years that she's apologized to me.

I tried hard and was willing to clean house and do this and do that because I felt like I was just, what do you want to say, the live-in that they were allowing to live there. That I needed to help in my part. So to me, I was just a guest for a long time.

"I go off to college and it's like, oh my gosh, to feel so unbelievably alone."

I went to college and I sowed my oats initially when I first went out. I think, because it was really strange when I first left. It was like so strange. They never even called me for like nine weeks. You're talking about somebody that I lived with for four and a half years. That all of a sudden I don't even get a phone call for nine weeks? I go off to college and it's like, oh my gosh, to feel so unbelievably alone. It was amazing. So, my grades weren't real great.

I went a year and I ended up getting into an argument with them [her guardians] over the summer and ended up moving in with my brother and getting an apartment. Then got a job and went to hair school for a year. Ended up being a year and a half that I was out. But I was 17 when I graduated from high school, so I felt like I kind of needed that time. So, I went to hair school for a year and worked. My uncle was like we're not letting you go back to school until you finish this hair school because it was one of those things where I had a couple of months left and I was wanting to go back to college and knew that I didn't want to cut hair. It's like one of those things. You get out into the real world and you go, uh-uh. But it was good for me. It was good for me to see what it was like. That I really wanted my education.

So I finished in October and we ended up going back to trial as soon as I went back to college in January. We ended up going to trial in March. And that was still kind of a rough semester. And I ended up meeting the kids' dad. We ended up getting married that summer. And then I started carrying 18 hours a semester and making really good grades. You know it was one of those things that's like I felt like I got married because I wanted to have a family. It was all the wrong reasons to get married and he was all the wrong person that I would

never married had I waited. But my desire to have a family was more. I was kind of like, maybe if I got married I'd do really good in school. I'd have some kind of focus and reason for achieving. And you know, that's what it did. It served its purpose. And as soon as I finished my master's we divorced. I mean it was him. I was one of those people who gave 110 percent to everything I did. He just didn't like being married.

"That was a time in my life when I needed somebody the most."

[After I got married] everybody was like, oh she's married. She's gone on. We don't need to worry about her any more. That was a time in my life when I needed somebody the most. People don't realize that. And it's been hard because I've lost all my grandparents and everything. Over the last 10 years, so it's kind of like I'm here. And I have my brother and he's got his own life and they have a baby on the way and all that kind of stuff. And he wants me to live his life and not my life. And there's a lot of things that, like I said, I've gone through that he hasn't gone through and vice versa. But that's when it became hard for me, as I got older.

"You make bad decisions based on being desperate and alone."

When you go back and you look at all the reasons why you did certain things it was like, you know, I did. I admit it. In my head, I was like, the first guy that came along that said you want to get married, sure. That was my whole purpose. Like I said, I went out to [this small town] and ended up finishing up school. I was miserable marriage-wise, but I had two great kids. I got pregnant two months later and had two kids while I was in college. And then got married a year after we divorced. We were married six years. And same kind of scenario. Now here I had a three year old and a five year old and going "Who's going to ever want to marry me? I've been married and have two kids. I'm just an elementary school teacher." And one of those scenarios again where the nice guy comes along a year later and I get married. But this time I'm holding out. But you know, it's like you don't get enough chances. I try always to look at the bright side of everybody and you always find the negative

later. Just like I'm sure people do about me. You make bad decisions based on feeling desperate and alone.

I've always been very independent. I always feel like I've had to take care of myself and it's been real hard. My brother has helped me this last year and is going to continue to help me and it's been hard just letting go and… But he still wants to be a power. He still wants to be a dad and give me, you know, ultimatums and I'm like, come on. I'm almost 40 years old. Either you like what I'm doing or you don't. Either you want to help and help my life the way it is. But I can't live your life and the way you want me to live mine.

"Because that's why people get married because they want to have, they love having the family, going over to the in-laws and all that."

And sometimes you look at yourself, and I still to this day go who's going to want me? I don't have any family. Because that's why people get married because they want to have, they love having the family, going over to the in-laws and all that. I don't have that to give, so it's like when I look at somebody I always go, if you want me you have all of me. I have my children, but your family's going to be my family and it's important that they like me. So, I think just starting to read during the Ph.D. program and having that directed reading. They gave me suggestions of what to read and I think all of that has helped because you see other people's lives, have an understanding, and it helps you look at your own life and have more of an understanding of it and philosophize it, I guess.

"He and I have a relationship that can't be described. We can talk about anything."

Unlike Fran and Evelyn, Greta never formed a relationship with anyone that filled the gap left by the loss of her parents. She never formed attachments with her in-laws or the cousin who became her guardian. Friendships have been elusive. Recently she formed a friendship that has helped her get through her second divorce.

No, nobody that I've ever really gotten to know. I had a person kind of at a department store where I worked that I talked to a little bit, but they got… You know

people don't realize how important they can be in my life and I hate, you know, you don't want to suck them into your life saying, okay you're my adopted mom.

I have a guy that over the last two years has become my best friend. He's married. We're best friends. And I've never had that close of a relationship with a guy before. I mean most of my friends during high school were guys. The girls were always there, yeah, yeah, kind of thing. And of course they all thought I was trying to steal their boyfriends because my friends were guys. And I'm not. I don't want your boyfriend. But, his wife and I've become friends. She has kind of the same issues. It's hard. He and I have a relationship that can't be described. We can talk about anything. He's seen my ups and downs. Marriage ups and downs. He's a little younger than I am.

He lost his dad four years ago to cancer and his mom had breast cancer right after his dad died. She'd doing fine. She's in remission. He understands loss. I don't know if that's kind of our connection, but he has one of those personalities that everybody likes him. People are drawn to him. It was one of those things, I guess I was just lucky. Because I needed that. I needed to see that there was life after marriage and I developed that friendship before I divorced, because otherwise I don't know if I could've gone through divorce even though I needed to be. I was just dying inside. On the outside I was… I even went and got a tattoo. A midlife crisis thing. You just kind of go woooooo. Okay. Hold on. Let's get control here. (Laughter.)

"I've been through more this year than anybody deserves to go through …They give me courage to keep going…"

Greta is currently unmarried. Her brother is a newlywed and is expecting a child. He lives several states away. Greta is focused on her children and completing her doctoral degree in a year that has been filled with numerous losses and stress.

Right now, my children. Because they're what I have focused on. Whenever I've had a time in my life in the last year – I didn't have a job; I went through a divorce; had a

> bankruptcy; and then found out I don't have a job again – has been just unbelievable. It was like I've been through more this year than anybody deserves to go through, much less all that I went through before. But it's like, oh my gosh. They are my focus. They are my drive. And school. Those are my main things that I just keep focusing and every now and then I've got to stop and think oh, what about you? But right now they're going to be a junior and senior this year. Right now they have to be my sense of direction. They give me courage to keep going whenever I sometimes want to go I don't know if I'm going to find another job.

Fran

"Her kids are the only cousins my kids have. …I need that relationship to stay good."

Fran is very aware of the importance of family. After Marian's death, she became concerned her in-laws will abandon family celebrations. Wallace, Kevin, and his sister, Betsy, did not want to talk about Marian. Betsy has visited Fran and Kevin in their home only a couple of times in the two years since Marian died. This has upset Fran. McGoldrick notes:

> One of the most difficult aspects of denied or unresolved mourning is that it leaves families with no narratives with which to make sense of their experience. If events cannot be mentioned or if the family "party line" cannot be expanded upon, it is almost impossible for family members to make sense out of their history altogether and gives the next generation no models or guidelines for integrating later losses. (1991, p. 55)

Fran experienced depression after Marian's death. She did not connect her feelings to Marian's death because it had been over a year since the loss. Her doctor finally convinced Fran to talk to a counselor who immediately diagnosed the root of Fran's problem as grief. He advised her to persuade Kevin to talk about the loss of Marian, but Betsy has been unable to talk about her mother.

> And I guess when I was so young, with my parents, I don't know if I did [talked about the loss] or not. I guess I did, but I don't remember if I did. But with her [Marian], it's like she was it. Now there's no mother, no mother-in-law, and I needed to talk to somebody.

And I think I feel the loss, I don't want to say more than Kevin or Betsy, but because they didn't go through that like I did. I'd met Kevin when my dad died. We were married when my mom died. But he didn't get to know her that well. We'd only been married a year and a half. And my sister-in-law still has a mother-in-law. They've still got somebody. Wallace is still with us. So Kevin still has his dad and they were real close. So, they've still got people. Here again, now I have Wallace. Period. It's like I lost my mother a second time. And Wallace and I are close, but we've never been as close as my father. He's close with his son. I think he and Kevin have gotten a lot closer since she died, which is a good thing. But, yeah, it's like I've had the rug pulled out once, twice, three times.

You know, I guess that's what makes me maddest at my sister-in-law, and this is probably off the subject, but if we can live in this house with all the memories she can step through the door and eat a dinner. We've gone through a lot living here. …If I can go through that and live here, she can come in and have a meal with me. And I want to tell her that, but I don't know how it'll be received. And I don't want to make it worse than it is; I don't want to make the damage worse and irreplaceable because we don't live in the same town and so we can't talk that often. It's important to Kevin. He needs his sister. Her kids are the only cousins my kids have. Now my sister has step-kids, but Betsy's children are the only true cousins that my kids have. Now they have two others on the other side of the family, but they're it. So, I need that relationship to stay good, and I want it to. She's all I've got back here, too. (Laughter.)

"I hurt deeper when my friends do something or don't include me. …They don't think anything about it because they've got family."

Losing Marian has been difficult for Fran. She realizes how much she depended on Marian for emotional support and friendship.

I really think it's made my friendships with friends more intense because I don't have the mother figure. I've got to make it [circle of friends] bigger. And I hurt deeper now.

> A friend hurts your feelings and it's no big deal, you've got your family. But, I don't know. I hurt deeper when my friends do something or don't include me or don't call me for this or that. They don't think anything about it because they've got family. But I hurt deeper because I don't have that. It's not their fault. They don't understand that because they've not been through it. They don't get it. So I have to deal with that lots of times. I'll just kind of swallow and go on. They don't understand. There's lots of times I feel like I don't have anyone to talk to. They don't get it. Kevin doesn't get it sometimes. You know, he's still got his father. He had is mother until a year and a half ago. He grew up with his mother. He had two children. His mother knew his children. I feel cheated out of that sometimes. I feel cheated.

"We don't have to give them up; we can all just meet together."

Fran and Kevin never had the dilemma of deciding which side of the family they would spend Christmas and Thanksgiving with each year. She realizes her children have never experienced how couples resolve this common conflict and will most likely have to face this issue when they marry. Fran sees their marriages as an opportunity to enlarge her family circle.

> I hope, my prayer would be, that maybe it's a family we all know and we can all include each other. I hope that's what it can be. We don't have to give them up; we can all just meet together. But, who knows? Who knows? My prayer has been, and I've prayed for my kids' spouses since they were babies. I've prayed that they're being raised the same way my kids are being raised because I know Kevin and I getting married and being raised the same has helped us through a lot of things. It has kept down a lot of fights and it has helped us through a lot of things. So, I really have prayed that my kids' spouses are being raised the same way my kids are being raised, in Christian homes, preferably a Baptist home. I think that'd keep down a lot, too, but you can't always get that. I just pray that they've been raised

the same way, and that the values will be the same in the family and that they'll intermingle with us and them as well as [my in-laws].

"I guess that made me feel more special about them after she died because they included my mom in stuff."

They [Marian and Wallace] loved my mother. They didn't get to meet my dad. Kevin met my dad one weekend; he went home with me before Dad died. But they met my mom and Mother drove here when we got married. And she and my sister rode with Wallace and Marian to Colorado to surprise us at our wedding. So they spent a lot of time with my mom, included her in everything. And I guess that made me feel more special about them after she died because they included my mom in stuff. Mom loved them to death. Thought I'd made the right choice. That was special. So I hope that we have that same relationship with my kids' in-laws. You know you hear such horror stories. (Laughter.) I don't want to be in a horror story. (Laughter.) Kevin didn't have to deal with it [in-laws]. Even though he loved my mother. The only way that Kevin has to know who my parents were is through me, and how they've raised me. And I have good, fond memories of both of them, more probably of my father just because I was closer to him. We did more together. But I have memories of my mother, too. As long as it's been, there's times I think, "Gosh, do I remember what they looked like? Do I remember how they sound?" Of course, I've got pictures of them. But I can't imagine them old. They would be in their sixties now, almost seventies, and I see my aunts and uncles and I think, "Gosh. I just can't imagine my parents." Because I never saw them old.

Evelyn

"They get such a kick out of watching the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren do the things that we did when we were little, because we talk about them all the time."

Evelyn's extended family gets together around Father's Day each year for a reunion on their father's home place. They did not begin doing this until after his death. They did not

have large family gatherings with their father after the death of their mother because their stepmother was uncomfortable with entertaining such a large group.

> After he died, this was their [the siblings'] expression, I don't know if it was my expression, but it was my siblings' expression of continuing his presence, that presence at the farm because no one lives there now. The old house is still there, but no one lives there. This time last Saturday there were 82, and that wasn't near all of us. We had some of Daddy's distant nieces who are now very elderly who came from California to be there with us. But mostly it was just brothers and sisters, their children, and their children's children. And there were 82 of us there. They get such comfort, and I guess I do, too. All the young ones coming back, and they bring their trailers. There were two mobile homes, there were 10 travel trailers, and there were three or four pop-ups all around the house and the barns. They get such a kick out of watching the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren do the things that we did when we were little, because we talk about them all the time. We talk about going swimming in the creek. Well, they take the kids and they go swimming in the creek. And they take them to the ponds where we used to fish. They are still doing those things. I really think that's Daddy more than it is Mother. They do it on Father's Day. It's all very meaningful. I'm not one of them because I live a distance from there, but I have brothers and my sister, also, who come in and work getting it all ready. It's a very busy time that they spend getting everything ready for people to come in.

"My work became important because I still feel like I am… I still mother."

Home and family are very important to Evelyn. Work has importance, perhaps more so now that her children are grown. Working with college students allows Evelyn to stand in the place of their mothers and do for them the things her mother did for her.

> I'm very much centered in my family, and my mother was that also. I've always, I've worked forever and ever, but I always knew my priority was my home. I'm very much into making my home a good place, and making those who come in enjoy the time that they're

there. I think my work is very meaningful to me, especially after the children were grown. My work became important because I still feel like I am… I still mother. I think this is what my mother would've done, too. I still mother those kids that come in my office that are so broken and have needs. I have been blessed and given gifts that I can discern many times the things that have been broken within them. We can maybe not fix it, but at least put a bandage on it, make it better, and we can see them become successful. Because they come in to us, and they're just babies and they're just trying to learn how to make their way. One thing that my mother taught me was that you're accepting of all people. She raised not only us, but half a dozen cousins because she could. So, I think that I take that into my teaching, that I'll just accept you wherever you are, whatever you are, and we'll try to get you through this. I think certainly that my work is an expression of all the things that are me.

Dorothy

"My friend's grandmother and grandfather were the perfect parents to me."

Dorothy was not close to her extended family who lived in another state. She only saw them at Christmas and during summer vacation. Dorothy did not feel alone because she has created her own extended family from her friends and their parents. This created family was in place from the time Dorothy was a child, and were a strong source of support for Dorothy when her parents died. Social support has been associated with those who have adjusted better after loss (Bonanno, 1999; Muller & Thompson, 2003, July).

We [Dorothy and her sons] created an extended family here. I have my grandmother and my sister, two sisters, and my brother and another mother, you know. It's just really weird. …I had it [the created extended family] during [the deaths of her parents] because they, my friend's grandmother and grandfather, were the perfect parents to me. I wanted them to be my parents, too. Her grandmother and her grandfather were consistent. They worked and stuff.

Her grandmother was an usher in a Methodist church, so we would go to church practically every Sunday and sit in the back and giggle and get the mean looks or the thump up the side of the head or the gloved finger. Then we'd sneak off to the basement. We could still hear the sermon, and drink pop. The soda machine was in the basement. In the summer we had to go across the street to the Holiness church for summer school. When we didn't go to the Methodist church on Sunday, we'd visit a Baptist church that was about five or six blocks away. So I had an interesting upbringing in a lot of the denominations.

"I'm grateful for that, that my parents, and they had friends that were different races, rich and poor, so that was good."

Dorothy believes she was very fortunate. Her parents formed her character, however she views the neighborhood she grew up in as a sort of extended family that influenced her values and attitude toward life.

Of course, their life [her parents] and the life they provided for me absolutely formed my character. That is because, and I later found out, especially since I've been here at the university, how fortunate I was. I never thought that I was unfortunate, but I have come to appreciate my upbringing even more when we talk about various things and people relate their childhood and the things they went through or brought from their childhood. I'm speaking on cultural differences and stuff like that. Very fortunate. My parents had friends, I guess, in every category. I grew up in a neighborhood that had businesses and residences. All of the businesses, with the exception of one, were run by white people. So you've got white people practically living in your neighborhood because they've got their businesses and you're interacting with them. So you grow up with a sense of nobody is above me or better than me. These are people just like me. They treated me well. Prejudice, I never learned prejudice, I guess is what I'm trying to say. That is so beneficial when you grow up like that because that's the kind of person you turn into. You don't know prejudice. You don't… And I did experience it when I became an adult because I had jobs that… My first

profession was bookkeeping and accounting. I worked in offices that were prejudiced; had never had any black people. I was the first or second. I got the experience of racial prejudice from there. As an adult, I'm already an adult, so it didn't bother me. So I'm grateful for that, that my parents, and they had friends that were different races, rich and poor, so that was good.

I grew up in a working neighborhood. We were fortunate to have the businesses, like the little strip mall things. There was a strip mall a couple of blocks from me. Next door was a grocery store. Neighborhood grocery store ran by a Jewish man. And across the street from the Holiness church, up the street, was a funeral home. The odd thing about it is it was the only black-owned business, but the man looked as white as you. And I'd find myself just staring, you know, for a child you can't figure this out. Now he's supposed to be black, but he looks white. (laughter) Two blocks away was the school. A very good neighborhood.

Angela

"I thought I was invisible."

Friendships offer another source of support. Sometimes the friendship and the type of support may come as a surprise. Romanoff and Terenzio (1998) found that having the survivor's legitimacy of his or her relationship with the deceased acknowledged is one factor that helps those dealing with loss and bereavement. Angela's family did not discuss the loss of her father. A classmate's essay about Angela's loss took on great meaning for Angela. She realized she was not alone and that someone else acknowledged her loss and was concerned about her recovery.

And another thing that kind of stands out about that experience that has always stayed with me and seemed odd to me, and I guess it wasn't, but just seemed that way, was a girl that I was in class with, I really liked, she was a bright student, but she was also not one of the popular, pretty girls, you know, she was a farm girl. But she had a bright mind and a

> good heart and she was real neat. But she wrote an essay, and did it extremely well, and she was writing about her friend and she was writing about me. About how I had seemed to be just numb and distant and how she was glad to see me begin, and this was about six months later, I was beginning to seem like myself again. Which I thought was a really interesting thing for someone to do. And I was touched that she would take the time to do it or to think about me in that way. That she would do that and she would bother to write about it. All of that seemed... I guess I thought I was invisible, I always think I'm invisible, and I'm not invisible.

Family Impact on Finding Meaning

The stories of the women in this study suggest that regardless of the size or makeup of our family – immediate, extended, or created – family relationship is an important component in our journey to make sense of the death of our parents. Brenda, Charlotte, and I come from families that are not only filled with aunts, uncles, and cousins, but are also rich in traditions and rituals. Traditions and rituals provide a context for knowing who we are in the world and how to respond to family events such as weddings, births, divorces, and deaths. It is helpful when there are older family members who can help the surviving adult daughters by remembering the daughters as children and confirming and clarifying memories and childhood events. Families that are able to continue holiday gatherings/traditions or reinvent the celebrations help survivors relocate and perhaps include their lost loved ones in the present. Brenda and Charlotte said they didn't always appreciate the rituals and traditions in their family until after their parents died. They now see family as a way of keeping memories alive today and for future generations.

Greta, Angela, and Fran lost one or both parents while they were children or very young adults. Greta was 12 when her parents were murdered. Angela was 16 and Fran was 18 when they each lost their father. Greta's extended family was not present for her in the

years following the deaths of her parents. No one filled the role of "mother" or "father" and it seems no one talked about the loss with her. Out of the seven women in this study, Greta continues to have difficulty making sense out of the loss of her parents' deaths, let alone finding any benefits as a result of their deaths. She continues to have problems in the areas of self-concept and relationship to others. She is still struggling to define a "new normal" (Bowman, 1999; Lester, 1995; K. Mitchell & Anderson, 1983; Parkes, 1996).

Fran was faced with the task of getting to know her mother, and within four years, lost her mother as well. She felt the support of her extended family for a year or so after her mother died, but did not feel there was really anyone there for her until she bonded with her mother-in-law, Marian. Marian's death has been difficult because for Fran it's like losing her parents all over again. Fran wants to expand her circle of friends because she realizes she needs to replace the loss of her family support system.

Angela didn't talk about the availability of extended family support, but she did live in a family that practiced a form of Stoicism. She did not feel free to express her feelings or talk about her loss to anyone. Friends, such as her English teacher, did not respond to her attempt to express her feelings. Angela was moved when a friend recognized her grief by writing an essay about her. It is notable that Angela still includes this anecdote when telling the story of her father's death 36 years later.

Evelyn was in her early twenties when her mother died. She is close to her siblings and their families even though they were unable to continue having family gatherings at her father's home when he remarried. Evelyn felt she lost her father when he remarried, and her mother-in-law was able to step in and fulfill the role of "mother" for her. She has been able to form a close attachment to her husband's family. Mrs. W.'s death has affected Evelyn in

much the same way as losing a parent since Mrs. W. was Evelyn's surrogate mother for almost as long as Evelyn knew her mother.

Dorothy, an only child, did not find herself alone after the death of her mother. Even though she was not particularly close to the families of either parent, she had already formed her own extended family out of her childhood friend's family and siblings. She has found this created family very supportive.

The journey to meaning begins with telling our stories in the context of relationship, which leads to accepting our loss and facing the changes and challenges the loss brings. Family and friends can help or hinder the journey as we work through the pain of grief. This all works together to help the survivors move toward finding a way to have our lost loved one with us.

CHAPTER SIX – CREATIVE EXPRESSION AFTER LOSS

They Are With Me

Marsha - 1998

The soft plopping of summer rain gently sounds outside the open kitchen window. The temperature is hovering in the lower 70s, practically cold for a June day in Oklahoma. I look down at the box of Hershey's® Cocoa in my hand and smile. There it is, Mother's fudge recipe. Today is just the right kind of day for it. On rainy days when there was nothing for my sister and me to do, she would walk out of the kitchen beating a batch of fudge as it cooled in her black, iron skillet. We could hardly wait for her to pour it onto a big dinner plate to harden. Soon little mounds of chocolate dust flanked the knife marks that crisscrossed the round slab of uneven one-inch squares of fudge.

Let's see, I'll need sugar, salt, milk, butter, and vanilla. And don't forget Mother's original iron skillet. The mound of sugar in the skillet soon turns a lovely crystalline brown as I stir in the cocoa and salt. The milk, combined with the heat from the burner, soon melts everything together into a syrupy, chocolate soup. After it begins to boil, I take it off the burner and add the vanilla and butter. I begin stirring it, just as Mother did, until it turns glossy and starts to cool. The buttered plate is ready. I pour it out and wait.

Thinking about those fudge-waiting times with my sister, I call Regina.

"Hey, you'll never guess what I'm doing today," I said.

"What?"

"I'm making fudge just like Mama used to make."

"You're kidding?" Regina said. "Me, too."

"Is it raining in Texas, too?"

"Yeah. I guess that's what put us in the mood," she laughs.

"Right."

"I've got to get mine off the stove and add the butter," she said.

"Okay. I think mine's just about ready to cut. Bye." I laugh as I hang up the phone.

This sort of thing has happened more than once. We get urges to do things we never, or rarely, did while our parents were living. I don't cook much, and I can take or leave chocolate. After Mother died, I dreamed about her often. Mostly the dreams were about Mother trying to let us know that we needed to come dig her up. She was completely well and we had somehow buried her by mistake. Then, I began to have dreams that included Daddy. These dreams usually involved riding in a car with him at the wheel. Somehow they were alive, or trying to get us to realize they were alive, and needed us to come and get them. It would all seem so real until some part of my brain insisted they were really dead. When I'd finally wake up, it would take several minutes for me to sort the dream images out and sadly remember my parents really were gone. I told Regina *about my dreams, and discovered she was having almost the exact same dreams. We began to compare dreams. It turned out we often dreamed similar dreams on the same night.*

Then we began noticing we were doing things they had enjoyed doing. By now we took it for granted Mother and Daddy would show up or influence our decisions when we least expected it. For example, Regina *decided to buy a Cadillac®. She'd never driven particularly large cars, but Daddy always drove a Lincoln®, Mercury®, or Cadillac®. We laughed and said it was Daddy. He didn't influence me to buy gas-guzzling automobiles, but he did get me outdoors. I have never enjoyed getting hot, sweaty, or dirty. He always gardened and tried to get me to help him when I was little, but I hated it. Before he died, he and I shared some gardening tips while I lived in Virginia. It was a way to connect with him while living so far away. Now I found myself in my backyard in Oklahoma, sitting in the dirt, clawing grass clumps out by the roots, and planting tomatoes, squash, and onion sets by hand. At least when I lived in Virginia my husband broke the dirt up with a tiller. As the plants took hold I remembered the tips Daddy had passed on to me.*

"Be sure and pinch off the suckers if you want more tomatoes."

"What's a sucker?" I'd ask.

"Those little shoots that come up on the plant," he'd say. I never was sure exactly what he meant, but I'd look for them and pinch stuff off anyway.

"Now here's something I figured out," he'd say. "I rigged up a gallon milk jug and punched a few holes in the bottom of it so the water drips on the tomatoes all the time."

I tried something like this, except I buried coffee cans next to the tomatoes and kept them filled with water. Daddy was right. The tomatoes loved this. When it came time to pull the spent plants up, I had to get help because the roots were so large and embedded.

So, yes, my parents show up just about every day. I never know if I'll suddenly get an urge to make fudge or hang out in the plant department at the local building supply store. I just smile because I know they are with me. It's comforting to realize the activities and things they cherished and enjoyed have become part of my life. It's a way to stay connected and honor their memory.

Continuing Bonds

Relationships do not end when one of the people in the relationship dies (Schuchter & Zisook, 1993). Many bereaved individuals feel a need for a continuing psychic connection with the one who has died (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). In the twentieth century most theories of grief recovery posited that it was necessary for the bereaved to disengage from the deceased in order to recover and mourn effectively (Freud, 1917, 1957), however recent research, most particularly after Bowlby's (1980) work with attachment theory, suggests it is normal and helpful for the bereaved to deal with their loss by maintaining a connection or continuing bond with the deceased (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996; Servaty-Seib, 2004, April). Fraley and Shaver (1999) found that bereaved individuals cope with the death in much the same way that they cope with the loss of relationship with a living person. The ways in which the bereaved reorganize their lives is also comparable to "other developmental

transitions such as being able to remain connected to living primary caregivers and yet establish new connections through adult relationships" (Servaty-Seib, 2004, April, para. 28). In light of Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1980), healthy recovery after loss involves "…finding a way to maintain a secure bond with the attachment figure while simultaneously acknowledging that the person is not physically able to provide comfort and care" (Fraley & Shaver, 1999, p. 754, in Servaty-Seib, 2004, April, para. 29).

All of the women in this study have found some way to connect or continue to have a relationship with their parents. Greta, because she was so young at the time of her parents' deaths, does not have as many points or memories available to her as do the other women. Most of the women express this continued bond in a variety of ways.

Reconciling Our Losses

Reconciliation or complicated grief – bereaved individuals will move toward one or the other of these dichotomies as they deal with their loss (Whiting, 2001). Muller and Thompson (2003, July) provide the following definitions for these terms.

> Reconciliation is defined as writing the loss into one's life story by doing a variety of adaptive behaviors. Such behaviors include surviving, remembering, accepting, changing perspective, accepting reality, honoring the past, and creating the next chapters of one's life story. Failure to move toward the reconciliation phase results in complicated grief, which is grief that is prolonged, postponed, displaced, or suppressed. (p. 201)

The women in this study appear to have moved toward reconciliation. Their stories indicate they have survived, remembered, accepted the reality of their loss, and their perspectives on life have been altered. They are honoring the past in a variety of creative ways. Greta seems to have had more difficulty in moving toward reconciliation. She continues to survive despite many setbacks that may or may not be related to the traumatic loss of her parents. She is actively working to create the next chapters of her story.

Creative Expression of Our Bonds

Creativity and meaning-making are closely related. Gordon (2000) considers the search for meaning as essential to the creative process.

> Essential to and underlying the creative process is the search for meaning; and meaning, so it seems to me, evolves out of a synthesis of the process of differentiation and ordering on the one hand and the making and discovering of something new on the other. It is thus inseparable from the capacity for awe and wonder and from the courage to be genuinely available to any kind of experience, however unfamiliar, new, bewildering or unknowable it may be. (pp. 129-130)

This suggests there should be some form of creative expression as a result of finding meaning after loss. Creativity is part of our relationships to others, ourselves, and inherent in our growth and development (Gordon, 2000). Death, or our awareness of death, may be necessary for the human capacity to symbolize, make meaning, and create.

> Psychological growth, development and the general self-fulfillment of a person seems inconceivable without conscious acknowledgment of the fact of death. In particular the capacity to symbolize – without which all experience is doomed to be without meaning and significance – is likely to remain fallow and undeveloped unless a man live his life consciously aware of death. (Gordon, 2000, p. 4)

This does present an interesting dilemma. Would humans need to find meaning if there were no losses or trauma to confront? Animals are not creative and they have no conception of death. They merely live their lives using instinct as a guide to behavior. They are not faced with living their lives with the knowledge that they and their loved ones will die.

Death loss results in change for the bereaved. They may find themselves working to find a balance between their new internal needs/changes and external needs/changes. This is called creative adjustment (Sabar, 2000; Servaty-Seib, 2004, April). It is necessary to change the internal self and reorganize the external world "to fit the new reality of the deceased person no longer being physically present" (Sabar, 2000, p. 161, in Servaty-Seib, para. 16).

Mourning is a crisis of meaning (Hagman, 2001). The women in this study used storytelling, ritual, and tradition to find meaning in their loss (Zeitlin & Harlow, 2001). These women used many ways to creatively express the meanings they have found and to maintain a bond with their parents. Several subthemes emerged under the theme of Creative Expression: Storytelling, Assuming Behaviors and Roles, Sharing Wisdom, Making Them Proud, Continuing Traditions, and New Directions. The stories of these women suggest that a creative outcome is the end result of the successful completion of the mourning process (Pollock, 1989).

Storytelling

Brenda

"They were talking about stuff that they did when they were kids with Mother and Daddy."

> We like to sit around and talk about things we used to do. My kids, of course, are in their 30s. They have come to the point where they like to hear all these stories. Plus, my kids were teenagers when my parents died and I've often wondered if they remembered a lot. On the Fourth of July we were sitting around talking and they were telling all kinds of stories. They were talking about stuff that they did when they were kids with Mother and Daddy. They were talking about when they got in trouble for setting the closet on fire, doing stuff like that, and they remember all of that. Somebody said, I think Kathy, [my niece], said, "Papaw or Mamaw gave me a spanking." Anthony, [my son] said, "Well, it had to be Mamaw because Papaw never spanked any of us." I think probably, even though my grandkids and Charlotte's didn't have the opportunity to meet them, I think it's what we've been taught, we taught our kids that's gone down to our grandkids.
>
> I think it teaches them strong family ties, which they have. I think that's something that a lot of families don't have anymore. I think it's important.

Charlotte

"And they tell these stories over and over again."

Every Fourth of July the kids all come and we shoot fireworks off. Especially since we've gotten the swimming pool. When Laura is here, Brenda's daughter, all the kids are here all the time. When we are here we have a big day of it and we swim and have a good time. When it gets dark, we sit around and tell stories. Sometimes they're the same stories about Mother and Daddy. And the kids tell stories, and sometimes Brenda and I don't even participate, but the kids tell stories about Mother and Daddy. And what they did as kids. Sometimes it's the same stories over and over again. But they still laugh just as hard. And they tell these stories over and over again. They all sit around and they tell these stories about Mother and Daddy and they laugh and talk about it. And it's just like, this year after the fireworks they all get out here and they tell stories about Mother and Daddy. They do it all the time. Sometimes with the expense of the pool it's kind of difficult, but since we've put the pool in, because this is a nice place to congregate, then the kids just sit around. We enjoy that. They talk about Mother and Daddy all the time.

Alan, [my son], was two years old when Mother died. He thinks that he remembers Mother, but he doesn't. And he barely remembers Daddy because he was only six when Daddy died. But the kids have told him so many stories a lot of times he thinks he was there at things when he wasn't even born. Because they tell so many stories. Surprisingly enough, not too long ago, my daughter, Kathy, just remembered, and I had forgotten about, a story when Anthony, [my nephew], had locked Kathy in the coffee table. Anthony had put my daughter in the coffee table and locked her up. We were gone and Daddy was there. Anthony was talking about how Daddy was just screaming and yelling trying to find her. And she was yelling, "Papaw, Papaw!" And they had forgotten about it and something reminded them of it. They are always coming up with new stories that we'd even forgotten about until they start talking about.

Evelyn

"I talk about my mother all the time."

I talk about my mother. I talk about my mother all the time. I have pictures of her that they know that that was their grandmother. I talk about things that she did. They know that she sewed for me and she made my clothes.

Dorothy

"It's always the good, not the bad."

Yes, I do [tell my boys stories about my parents]. It's always the good, not the bad. They did have to know some of the bad for reality's sake. But always the stories we tell and talk about now are just the good things because that's the kind of person I am.

Angela

"I decided I would turn in a paper … because it was one way I could vent my feelings …"

I kept trying to find a way to talk about it. So in English class, I was always good in English, I liked to write stories. I just voluntarily wrote all kinds of stories, science fiction, made up things. I decided I would turn in a paper and try to express what happened because it was one way I could vent my feelings or at least express them because no one asked me anything. No one talked about grief. There was no expression of grief. So I wrote this paper that was trying to describe what I just described to you and I really struggled to do it and it wasn't a well-written paper. I was trying to re-create the tension of the clock ticking and my rising trepidation and realization that I was going to have to be the grown-up. I was going to have to be prepared to be the head of the family. Which is what happened. And I didn't know how to say that and I didn't know that was what I was trying to say.

The essay that I wrote for English, I expected it to be received in the manner that I was writing it, which was an expression of grief. I had become pretty good friends with the English teacher. I was in junior second semester English. Two of my closest friends at school were two teachers and, I just felt connected with them. And one of them was the

English teacher. She lived two doors down. She was a single woman, overweight, not talkative, insecure. She graded it based on its merits as an essay instead of trying to understand what I was saying. I remember being very hurt by that.

Assuming Behaviors and Roles

Brenda

"You feel like you've got to fix everything."

As I've gotten older I have noticed that I do things, maybe not cooking or anything like that, just little things that when I see myself doing them I think, Mother used to do that. I've laughed at lots of things. Charlotte and I laugh a lot about what Mother and Daddy used to do and say, especially Daddy because he had a hot temper. He'd get real mad and then he'd get over it and buy you something.

I feel I'm sure like Mother did, when you feel like the hub of everything and I think it's probably how Mother felt. I don't know if you think about it logically, it's just kind of always there. You feel like you've got to fix everything. (Laughter.) I've got to get out of that. That's the way Mother always was. She would just show up when you needed her. I'm not the mother she was, but I keep trying to be. I think that's important. I think a lot, "I wonder what Mother would do?" I do that.

It's funny to look back and see how many things they (aunts) did alike. I remember when I thought I had become an adult. We were over at Grandmother K.'s. We used to, and even after I got married, we'd just sit around and talk, get up from the table and go sit down and talk to everybody. The older ladies would go to the kitchen. The first time I remember going into the kitchen and picking up and cleaning up I didn't even think about it and I said, "Ha ha! I'm an adult." (Her children are now going into the kitchen and cleaning up after Thanksgiving.) That's just life. If you stop and think about getting old it scares you. But if you just don't think about it and live one day at a time it's a gradual progression. Because you don't want to do what you used to do.

Charlotte

"I catch myself doing things or saying things that Mother did."

I think what affected me more about Mother is how she reacted to things. I think especially a lot of times I think about things and I think about how Mother reacted to situations. I think I've incorporated more of that. Things that she used to do... and sometimes I catch myself doing things or saying things that Mother did. I find that, I don't know if it's habit or if I'm just doing that.

Bill likes to the things because Daddy did it. We laugh sometimes because I remember, Bill used to work on his car and he would call Daddy on the phone. They would be on the phone and Daddy would tell him how to fix something wherever we were. Bill depended on Daddy a lot for things like that. One time several years ago he was working on the car and couldn't do whatever it was that he wanted to do and he was real angry. He said, "I'd give anything in the world if your Daddy was here so I could get him to show me how to do that." And I said, "Bill, Daddy'd be 75 years old. He'd be too old." (Laughter.)

Greta

"But I still try to find the good …I think that's something that you're instilled, that comes from your parents."

I'm sure we all find a little bit of ourselves from our parents. We all have some of the same qualities. I still look at the good in people and they always did. No matter what you want to see, I guess to a degree it can make you naïve even though I'm a pretty good judge of character now. I think I've always been and you always hate to be that way. But I still try to find the good; still try to give people chance after chance. And I think that's something that you're instilled, that comes from your parents.

And then also, the need for education. My mother, she still got her degree. She wanted to go to law school. That was her dream. We didn't know how she was going to do it, but that's what she wanted to do. My dad ended up getting his Ph.D. Both of those things

are things that I took with me. And family was important. But the way that society is, you can't have that and still, that's kind of old values of having a marriage that lasts for a lifetime. And here I'm looking at my third marriage and all the things that my parents said don't do, I've probably done and it's just because you make those mistakes in life and I'm sure that there was a part I did. I think the worst thing I do is spend too much money. I wasn't the one that was hurtful. I didn't drink. I didn't do all those hurtful things. But those things, family values.

Evelyn

"Sometimes I see in me more of him than I do my mother."

I mothered my children with a vengeance. I mothered my children probably more than they needed to be mothered. I did it probably to honor her. I did it because I was mothered, not like I did it necessarily, but this was part of her that I had to honor. They [the daughters] were absolutely amazing from the get-go and are now very independent and very much self-assertive and all the things that Mother would've wanted any of us to be. And part of that is that she was not allowed that. In her world as it was women were not allowed that. She was a woman who could not drive, had an eighth grade education, and 10 children. She was not allowed what they have been allowed. She didn't always understand what we did, but she always supported what we did.

Sometimes I act like [my father]. Sometimes I see in me more of him than I do my mother. He was very straightforward and, as you know, I tend to be very straightforward. My mother was very much a diplomat, which I can be that, but I think it's more in my nature to be very straightforward. He was very demanding, and I think I can be very demanding also. And I don't particularly like it when I realize that that's it. But I also think he was a very brilliant man. So, I think part of my intelligence, I think certainly my mother was, but I think also he was.

He thought working hard was very valuable. He thought having good common sense was very valuable – making good decisions was very valuable. Being respected by other people was of utmost importance to him. So, yes, I live those things, those values that he instilled. Absolutely.

Dorothy

"I can hear my mother."

I grew up in a two-story house. I hated the stairs the most because I had to dust. I had to clean up. I had to sweep. We didn't have a vacuum. The stairs had carpet on them, except for the edges. So I had to do the edges with the Pledge. It's the hardwood. Oh, I hated that. And my mother, when I'm cleaning, I can hear my mother, "Get the woodwork. Get the woodwork." (Laughter) "'Round the baseboard. 'Round the baseboard." (Laughter) When you're trying to do a shortcut, I can hear my mother. I find myself making expressions like my mother, facial expressions. I say, "Oh, God."

Sharing Wisdom

Brenda

"I find myself telling my kids and my grandkids things that my mother used to tell me."

I think just seeming like we're almost becoming our parents because they died early in their 60s. I'm almost in my early '60s. I find myself doing things they did and I find myself telling my kids and my grandkids things that my mother used to tell me. Do this or don't do this or this would be best. Not ordering them because Mother never did that. She never told us what to do. Just instructions.

Charlotte

"Sometimes I tried to say things to them that I think Mother would say…"

I do know sometimes I feel responsible, and Brenda does too, I feel responsible for her children. I take that role that Mother had. Sometimes I tried to say things to them that I think Mother would say, not maybe so much maybe as me. Mother's attitude about certain

things. Sometimes I feel like it's my responsibility to say these things, to take that place. Brenda does the same thing with my kids.

Greta

"You can see what a difference it can make in your life…"

I say to my kids, my parents thought it [education] was important, your dad's parents may not, but it's important to my family. You can see what a difference it can make in your life to have a degree and to not have a degree. I tried. My parents would've wanted me to stay in the marriage, and it just didn't happen. I tried. I gave my all. So I've made little comparisons like that.

Symbolizing Their Presence

Brenda

"It's a way of bringing her to the table."

I always put my mashed potatoes in a bowl that was Mother's to bring to family functions because it's kind of big. It's a way of bringing her to the table. I do that with Howard's mother. I have a bowl of hers and when we go to something like Christmas or whatever I always take it in that. My sister-in-law and people say, "Oh, that's Mother's bowl."

Charlotte

"I like to do things that Daddy did."

I think it's more emotional things. I like to have things around like at Thanksgiving I like something of Mother's on the table, something of Grandmother K.'s on the table. I like to do things that Daddy did. One thing we do every year because Daddy liked it, and the kids associate it with him, is the Fourth of July. We always shot fireworks off at Daddy's house. We still continue to do that every year. The kids won't go anyplace on the Fourth of July but here. Sometimes the kids will go on vacation and come home so they'll be here.

There are still things that happen, even though Mother been dead 21 years; there are still things that happen every day that remind me of them. Like in my job, I take claims from people. A few years ago I had a claim for a man who walked in the office. He was tall and skinny like Daddy. He didn't have any teeth. He had on overalls. He looked just like him. I couldn't even talk to him. I had to get up and leave. It was just so emotional.

Everything reminds me of Mother and Daddy. I get a new dress and that reminds me of Mother because she would be so thrilled that I had a new dress. We get a new car and that reminds me of Daddy. Bill and I say ooh, wouldn't Daddy like that? Mother always wanted me to have a red car. Every time I'd buy a car, she'd say, "If it were me I'd get me a red car." Even though my car is not red, it's maroon, we all said Mother would like that. Everything that we do, it's really surprising the older we get, Brenda and Howard and I, lots of things we do we say well Mother would like that or Daddy would like that. So there's just all kinds of things that we do that we associate.

Evelyn

"So, every Christmas she would put underwear in their stockings."

One of the things that we laugh about is, when [my mother-in-law's] kids were little they didn't have much money and they didn't have money to go out and buy underwear. She would make the boys underwear because she couldn't afford to go buy it. She said if they ever had any money she would make sure that they had bought underwear. So, every Christmas she would put underwear in their stockings. So that's one of those things that you continue because she did it and because it's a funny story, and because it's what she would want done. Now it's more of a token thing, but still we do it and we laugh about it and we remember her. So a lot of the things that we do now are to help remember the traditions that were important to her. We talk about her and we honor her in doing those things. I think her death was important to me. I think it was really important to me.

Dorothy

"I put effort and time into the house and to the lot."

I know my son mentions this a lot and I don't know if he's picking up on it subconsciously or if this is honestly the way he is feeling, but it's the house I live in. It was my parents' house. I put effort and time into the house and to the lot. I made it better than it was when they had it. And my son, every time I do something, some kind of achievement, he says, "I know Big Mama and Big Papa are smiling down from heaven."

That's the only thing that's going to be touching to me is that because I don't think of it like that. But I guess that's really it. My mother loved that house. And they loved being homeowners. (Wiping her eyes) So I said I'll just do the best I can. And the flowers that come up in my yard every year are flowers that she planted. That would be it.

I kept a deep freeze that she had. She got it when I was 13. My daddy bought it for her. She loved it and that deep freeze quit working years ago. I just couldn't get rid of it. And I said, "Now this is stupid." But then when I did get rid of it, I was thinking to myself, "I hate this. I hate to do this." I've still got her old washing machine. I'm going to have to get rid of that. It hasn't worked in years. These are things she treasured.

I have a lot of the things still that were my parents', for instance, my dining room set. I remember my parents purchased that when I was four years old. And a lot of the little knick knacks, she loved knick knacks, so the house has these built-in bookcases and I put all that stuff up in there so I don't have to dust it all the time. Once a year I go up there. (Laughter)

And there are some things in that house I'd never done before. I know when I first moved in with my mother, there was a lot of stuff I wanted to change, and I did. All of her plastic fruit, plastic flowers, gradually I'd begin to kind of throw those away. I'd take a bouquet here and fruit here, or something, until I had it all out. Then I wallpapered one of the bedrooms. I took up her rugs in the living room and dining room and put down carpet

that I just recently have taken up. And painted. This is a first thing for me, painting to the extent that I'm doing now and decorating and stuff like that. I'm enjoying it. And still I'm just really taking care of what I know she loved. They really loved. I just know how much it meant to them.

I really enjoy her flowers. I want to plant some things, but I can't because you can't dig in there because there are bulbs. We've got flowers coming up at different times of the year. So, I can't dig around and take up anything.

I love it. I love it. If I ever move from there, that's what I'd miss, her flowers. Even my tree, and it's just a wisteria, but she brought it from her brother's farm. It's a wisteria bush. I remember when she planted the little thing, and now it's a tree. What I did, I made it into a tree, rather than a bush by intertwining the branches. It looks like some kind of oriental tree. It's right there and it's full of, you know how they bloom those long purple flowers, and when [a friend of mine] passed by there, she said, "What kind of tree is that?" I said, "A wisteria bush." That's what everybody asks. "What kind of tree is that?" It's a wisteria bush I made into a tree. (Laughter) They bloom all the time. Mine's blooming now. But the first bloom in the spring is all flowers. They smell so good.

Making Them Proud

Brenda

"It's like you want to make them proud of you."

I think it's just knowing what Mother would want us to do and what Daddy would want us to do. They wouldn't want us to sit down, grieve and just... it's like you want to make them proud of you. That's part of it plus the things that you learned from them, as you get older you applied them.

Fran

"I felt like I was doing that for my dad."

But I felt like, and the reason I came back to college that summer was to… it was so important to my dad [for me] to graduate from college. He'd never gotten the opportunity to go. And growing up, that's all I remember hearing him say is he wanted me to go to college and graduate. So, it meant a lot to me to come on back because I felt like I was doing that for my dad. That was the last thing I could do for my dad.

Evelyn

"I would have loved for her to have been part of that."

Things [that I do in my life that are pieces of Mother] that had she had a chance maybe she would've done those things. She didn't have a chance to do those things. That's when I finished my dissertation and my Ph.D., and I think that's one of the days I missed her most was at graduation because I thought, oh man. This is a woman who in eighth grade couldn't go to school anymore because there was no school for her to go to. She had no access to go to high school. She was a very bright woman who hit a barrier and couldn't go beyond that. And yet, she wanted for my sister and me especially for us to have that opportunity to do whatever we wanted to do and saw to it that both of us got through college. Even though we got married, she made sure that we graduated from college. But for me to be able to go on and do the master's and do the dissertation and to do the Ph.D., to do all of that, would have just been so phenomenal for her to have seen that. I would have loved for her to have been part of that.

For me to be teaching here at the college I graduated from, which in the greater scheme of the world we would say it's not Harvard, okay, it's just XXU. But to her XXU was where my first brother went, the first one who went to college, went to XXU because it was close. She always thought it was the best school. And for me to have the opportunity to go back there and teach, to her it would've been Harvard. It couldn't have been any better

than XXU in her world. All of these things I've not had her to share with even though I know she would've gotten such a charge out of the fact that I'm doing them. I think she knew each of her children extremely well and she knew that I had the capability of doing this.

I've been frustrated as an adult because I would do something or I would be given an award, and I would think, "Oh, Daddy will be so pleased." That frustrated me because after a while I realized what I was doing was trying to please my father. Still trying to please my father even as a 40-year-old adult I was still trying to please my father. Probably didn't tell him things intentionally because I thought that's so stupid at this age to try to please your father. But I think I always did. And still, I think sometimes, "Well, Daddy would've gotten a kick out of that." Because it was important to him. Our name was important and that we be respected. That was very important. That we be people who were respected. It confirmed for him his self-worth by the things that we did.

Angela

"I only realized that later that that's why I was doing it, much later."

Well I didn't know that at the time that was why I was doing it [trying to major in chemistry]. I only realized that later that that's why I was doing it, much later. I felt relief that I was able to let go of it. At the time, I remember clearly how I evaluated it. To me it was a choice between should I do the highest thing that I'm capable of doing, the most challenging intellectual work, or shall I do something that I might find, that's enjoyable to me, which is a creative thing.

Continuing Traditions

Brenda

"It's important to keep people together at least once a year."

It's important. It's not just important because we all enjoy it so much, but it's important to keep people together at least once a year. Especially when you've lost most of

the older people who usually kept you together like your parents and grandparents. And we're lucky to still have some young aunts and uncles. They probably don't remember a lot more than we do. (Laughter.) That's our ritual. We even have certain foods that we have to have each year. Whenever we have chocolate pie, we think of Iris, regardless of who made it.

Charlotte

"The traditions are very important to us and we keep those alive."

The traditions that they had I think [we've incorporated] more that than anything else. Like I said, we have a lot of things that I try to tell them things that Mother thought. What she liked to do at certain times. So we try to keep those traditions alive more than just the things that they liked to do. The traditions are very important to us and we keep those alive. The kids look forward to it.

They like to do things the way Mother and Daddy did them, holidays and things like that. They like those traditions. If Brenda and I forget, they'll remind us about it. It's nice.

Evelyn

"And I sang those songs to my children."

I played games with my children that mother played with me. I taught them things, the silliest things. My mother, undoubtedly somewhere in her heritage had very southern roots and there was a mammy sometime in that heritage, also. I don't know where. They came from Kentucky originally, so it's certainly possible within the generations because there were very southern things that were passed down. My mother knew the songs. She sang songs about the pickaninnys, and this kind of thing. And I sang those songs to my children. I played games with them that were silly little games, but were very comforting. When my children were little and I would play those games it was very comforting to me to play those games and to sing those songs because it was so much a part of my mother. It was like giving them part of her, and part of that heritage from which she came. It's a comfort thing, too. Just to hear those words again. The kids found them comforting. Maybe it was my

attitude at the time that I did them with them. It's really funny that we do those things. But it's very much a part of her.

New Directions

Brenda

"We go on a lot of trips because Mother loved to travel."

Also the things that they didn't get to do you want to do. We go on a lot of trips because Mother loved to travel. Daddy had just as soon sit there and not ever go anywhere. Mother liked to travel and they were planning on traveling when they retired and they didn't get to. We do it now before we retire.

Greta

"I end up finding more of me, to me that's the most important thing."

Quite honestly, what my dissertation is going to reflect, not only forgiveness, but when I started reading all the women's memoirs and all that kind of stuff, I said, wow. This is my life. I've done all this stuff. It's been bad or good or made mistakes based on what has happened. I think I was… my second marriage I thought was great the first five years and then it went into this issue of he had problems. He became an alcoholic, did the whole AOL [AAA?] thing, cheating and the whole, that I dealt with. And I was like, somehow I deserved that. That that was my role. Here I was going to be miserable. And I started reading, I think… What's the name of the book? *Changes*? I have the book in here, but it's the way, how you are in your twenties, thirties, forties and how men and women view their lives and the roles that we play. And it was really funny that in my twenties or thirties I was already playing the role of a much older… I'd already gone through the, in my teens I was already at the twenties. In my twenties I was already at the thirties, because, just because of things. And it made me understand things of men and things that I had done and the expectations that, you know, I was like, man, I can't keep letting somebody else pull me down because I have to be my life. And that I deserve more than that. And sometimes you look at yourself, and I

still to this day go who's going to want me? I don't have any family. Because that's why people get married because they want to have, they love having the family, going over to the in-laws and all that. I don't have that to give, so it's like when I look at somebody I always go, if you want me you have all of me. I have my children, but your family's going to be my family and it's important that they like me. So, I think just starting to read during the Ph.D. program and having that directed reading. They gave me suggestions of what to read and I think all of that has helped because you see other people's lives, have an understanding, and it helps you look at your own life and have more of an understanding of it and philosophize it, I guess.

So when people say, what are you going to do with your Ph.D.? Are you wanting to teach college? It's kind of like this job. You know, I think it started out as being, I can make more money or whatever. Now it's for myself. It's a personal goal. It's something that I want to achieve. And I still have my brother going why do you want to finish it? It's not going to help you. Don't you want to do this? Don't you want to do that? So, I still have people tearing it down. It's like, can't you understand? Even if I'm going to owe $80,000 in student loans, but somehow make it work, but I end up finding more of me, to me that's the most important thing.

Fran

"But it was like after she died, I could do things I could never do."

I would've never dreamed that I'd sing in the choir. Even though I sang as a kid with Dad and I sang in choir in high school and college, but… and I didn't for a while. But it was like something clicked, and one time, the church choir director asked me to sing in the choir, and I did. It just feels right. Just because I can see me singing in my dad's choir or something, you know. It just feels right.

And I guess when I sing… it makes me think of my father because he was a music minister. We sang duets in church. One of my dreams was to play the piano while Dad led

the singing and we did that as I got older and took lessons. We did that. And that was always special. And I guess through my singing, it makes me think of my dad. It reminds me of my dad. And I like the hymns. I think that's why I hold on to the old hymns. That's why I don't like to go to that "seven eleven" stuff because they didn't have that back then and Dad's not around to tell me it's okay. I know in a weird way that sounds weird, but I was brought up very traditional, very old school, you know, and just the singing and the songs remind me of Dad. "How Great Thou Art" was one of his favorite, favorite songs. He had several, but that one just always brings a tear to my eye because that was one of my dad's songs he would sing as a solo. So, I guess my music would be what reminds me most of my dad.

And I never thought I'd do something like that [direct children's choir]. But I loved it. I enjoyed it. I learned to direct from my dad, just watching him. And he would play with me and we'd learn counts and all, because I took music lessons. That's just something we shared, the music. He played in the band in high school and he loved it when I played in the band. He was real big in band boosters when I was in high school. That was just something we shared in common besides church and God was music. So that was a real big part of us.

Yeah, the thing that just popped into my mind when you said that was Mother was an excellent cook. Excellent cook. And Kevin loved her cooking. And I never felt as good as her, never felt worthy that I could even compare to Mother. But it was like after she died, I could do things I could never do. It was like I could cook now like my mother. I could do things that I never could do before. The one thing that sticks out in my mind is my husband loves potato cakes; leftover mashed potatoes and you make them the next morning, potato cakes. Mother made those so wonderful. I could never do it. I'd try. I'd call her from here and say, "Mom, I can't do it. What's wrong? Kevin wants potato cakes." But after she died, it was just like, I could do it, just like her. My fried chicken was just like hers. It was like I could cook just like her.

Sewing was another thing. I loved to sew; never had a lot of time. Mother was the expert. If I had problems, I'd go to Mother. But after she died, it was like, wow! I can sew. I could do things in those two areas that I felt like my mother was the perfectionist at, she was the best, and now I felt like I was… It was almost like her hand was guiding mine doing the cooking or she was showing me where to sew. You see the little cartoons of the angel mom over (laughter) kind of guiding the sewing machine. That's kind of what I felt like. All of a sudden I could do traits of hers that I didn't feel competent to do before.

I love… and I've never been much of a gardening person. I've never been, but Mom [Marian] loved the flowers. And see I called her Mom. I started calling her Mom about 10 or 15 years ago. I asked them one time, can I call you all Mom and Dad and they thought that was wonderful. Because I'd hear other people call their in-laws mom or dad and I didn't have any right then. So, I wanted to call them Mom and Dad and they became my mom and dad. So, the flowers around the house here, I mean, she planted half of them, and the others that I've planted I've kind of done in a tribute to her. "Wouldn't you love this?" Or when I planted the last flowerbed out back, it was one that they don't come back, and even when I finished I said, "Mom, do you like it?" It's just… I talk to her. I've probably been the one that's been to the cemetery most. I go out and talk to her and make sure her flowers are pretty and… I take care of that.

Evelyn

"You're going to think this is crazy, but after she died I was in my kitchen and… it came to me. I can do this."

I think what I did, because it was a unique point in my history because I was pregnant, I think I wanted to become the mother. I think my driving force for, maybe still is, with my own children, was to be like she had been, to be that kind of anchor to my own children. I went into a fury after that of sewing and nesting and decorating and all of this. And I know that pregnant women do that some, but I didn't have a sewing machine. I

bought a sewing machine. I would sew from eight o'clock in the morning until I had to quit sewing. I made… I was frantic. It was, um… I would make a little green gown with a green blanket with green shoes with green burp rags. It was… I had to have it all just so. The nursery was decorated to the hilt. I tend toward that anyway, but it seems like I remember after that period of just being… I just had to create this stuff. I had to get it done. And I did it crazy. (Laughter) I was crazy in creating it.

Always before sewing was just something I did. If I were going to make an outfit, I'd make an outfit. But I didn't have to get it done. But I sewed… I was frantic in what I had to create. I created… you wouldn't have believed what I created during that time. I mean more than three or four kids could possibly have used. It was something within me that wanted it done. I did it. I was eight o'clock 'til whenever my husband said you've gotta quit. (Laughter)

Mother did that [sewed]. For my sister's children, and both of them had been born before she died, she had made them gowns. I knew that she couldn't make them for me. This was very much something that she would have done had she been there to do it.

She was there because she was the one who taught me to sew. That was something we shared and she didn't share that with my sister because my sister didn't sew. She shared that with me. So yes, that was very much a part of her that was there with me. And so maybe I thought if I sewed hard enough it would bring her back. (Laughter) It was like… the essence of her was there in that room with me and I would think, "Oh, I wish Mother could see this."

And it was very, very important for me to make their [Evelyn's daughters] clothes and to do the things that she did because I always loved it when she made my clothes because I was tiny. I could never have anything to fit unless she made it. And both my daughters were very tiny and I knew that I could make things that would fit them and could create these things. She would've loved it so much to have seen those things that I created. I

think she would get such a charge out of the fact that I do costumes. That this is something I have taken on into part of what I do professionally. She would've gotten such a charge out of that because my mother was extremely creative. She did not recognize that fact, but in her world during the Depression and so on to survive you had to be very creative. There was never a lot of money with that many kids. And she did such amazingly creative things. And now when I do creative things I think oh, she'd get such a charge out of this that I'm able to do these kinds of things.

I cook huge meals. This is silly, but I just thought of that. I cook huge meals for family. I do this for my mother-in-law who I lost also. And that's a very important loss in my life, too. I am the go-to person to do the big meals. That's what my mother would've done. It's why I do it. My mother would've done it and my mother-in-law would've done it.

I do [cook foods that my mother would've cooked]. And I especially cook foods that my mother-in-law cooked. Since I lost my mother so early, I cook more like my mother-in-law because she's the one, actually, who taught me how to do these things. But, yeah… and that's part of great joy because she, every time anyone came to the house we cooked the big meal and… I also live my life not complaining about certain things because I have so much more than my mother did. And any time I think something is really hard, I think of my mother having six boys, and the youngest one was 2, and she had twins. And I think if she can handle that I should be able to handle about anything. (Laughter) Anytime anything's hard. When I was working on my dissertation I would think, yeah this is hard, but I don't have six boys and twins. (Laughter) Nothing can be that hard.

[My mother-in-law] died the May after my father had died in December. And that's when I started doing the big meals. I'd never cooked Christmas dinner. She did it. I had never done these things, but I felt such a need to continue this family cohesiveness that was so important to her. Sometimes I am dead-tired, don't want to do it, but it is necessary because that is my expression of her because that was very, very important to her. So until

my father-in-law is gone, I will continue doing that because it is what she would desire done. I do things that she did for my nephew who had her less of a time, and I do things for my daughters that she did.

She was very significant in my life. But I think that the thing that I did creatively, or whatever, was the meals. I had cooked a meal or two that was big, but nothing, I mean now if you want to bring 20 people in I can put it on the table. And that's from watching her and knowing what she did. I have some of her recipes, also, but I didn't know I had that in me to do that until she died. And also, I could not make cream pies. My husband loves cream pies. He loves coconut cream pie and chocolate cream pie. I couldn't make piecrusts. I had tried and tried and tried to make piecrusts. Could not. And I would watch her do it. It had no rhyme or reason to it. She would put flour in a bowl. She would scoop some Crisco® in there. She would stir it up and roll it out and it would be just big ol' flakes, wonderful piecrusts. And I would try and try. I couldn't roll it out. I couldn't do anything. You're going to think this is crazy, but after she died I was in my kitchen and… My little nephew loves cream pies. He loves coconut cream and he was saying something about he would sure love some. And it came to me. I can do this. I know that I can do this. And I went into the kitchen and I made a beautiful piecrust and a coconut cream pie. I had never been able to do that. It seemed like she left it to me. I don't know, but I could do it all after she was gone and had never done it before. I make apricot fried pies for him because he and I have the same birthday. On our birthday she would always, she wouldn't make us a cake; she would make us this huge platter of apricot fried pies because we both loved them so much. So now I make apricot fried pies and all the kids in that family just have a fit because that's the way Mama did it. So, that's what I'm doing for her. I don't think I ever would have done any of that. I didn't know I could. I always could cook a little, but nothing like what I've done since she's been gone, and didn't even know I was capable of doing what I've done since she's been gone. And I do it to continue her. It's like I give that to my children. I give that to the

grandchildren. I give that to my nephew because that's the continuation of their grandmother. It's a piece of her.

I think many times when I'm doing it why didn't I do it while she was here? I know she was dead tired because I get tired doing it. So I know she was dead tired. Why didn't I go in there then? I didn't even think about going in there then. I always helped her. I mean I was always in the kitchen and I would do whatever she told me to do. But I sure didn't do as much as I was capable of doing. I could've done all of it. I could've said why don't you go sit down and let me do this. But I never did that. She was the one that ran the kitchen. It was [her expression of love] very much so. That she could wait on people and she could have them sit down to a pretty table was really an expression of her love.

Dorothy

"Subconsciously it was probably my father's alcoholism, too, that I wanted to understand."

Another thing that helped me was that at [college] my degree was in substance abuse counseling. So I learned a whole lot about alcoholism. My father was an alcoholic. About issues. I started looking beyond just what he was doing to me or to my mother, but what was done to him.

Subconsciously [the reason I picked this major] was probably because of [my father's alcoholism]. In reality I was telling myself that I chose it because of the drug epidemic that was in my neighborhood at the time, of crack cocaine. I truly wanted to understand that, the mindset, because there had been heroine around for years, but it didn't seem to have the hold on people as crack cocaine. To see a person destroy their life and just go downhill behind a drug like that, I had to understand. That was what really drove me back, but subconsciously it was probably my father's alcoholism, too, that I wanted to understand. Understand my mother and what made her…

Angela

"People grow in my garden."

I do it in my garden and we're sitting in my garden. Who knew that I would do this? I never liked to do [gardening]. It just kind of happened. My mother liked to sew and I rejected that. I found that in my garden I have plants, roses, in particular, that remind me of my family and others who I plant. People grow in my garden. Those two rose bushes over there, one is pink and one is pink and yellow, those are my mother's favorite colors. I planted both of those while she was still here and I renamed them for her so that she knew that she was cherished. The flower that my dad's father grew in his garden was a Chrysler Imperial red rose and she had a cutting from it and I had one and that's what's got me started. I kept that legacy alive and discovered that it was a great way to be able to keep people around me. The daisies there are for [my husband] because he likes daisies. So I look at those and I think of him. The yellow rose over there is my sister-in-law. I told my mother I was going to get a yellow rose for us to have yellow because her mother liked yellow. She decided she was going to buy one but this was in the last couple of months of her life and she couldn't get it done so she had my sister-in-law promise that she would get me a yellow rose bush from her. So I've got my grandmother, my mother, and my sister-in-law are all in that rose bush. So my garden has become my palette. And I just walk around and smile. Oh, this is so-and-so.

This was just more of a creative expression. It was just a way... it's a joy, a way of expressing joy. I didn't know I could keep anything alive. It's not a, it's not something I'm trying to be the best gardener or have a pretty garden; it's just that this is the fun way for me to have good memories about people. It's a pleasant thing, not a bad thing. A lot of my memories are not good. But these are pleasant.

Creating Bonds – Expressing Meaning

The women in this study have found a variety of ways to continue their relationships with their parents. Rarely was the creative expression something they consciously decided to do as a way to maintain a bond or find meaning in the deaths of their parents. Sometimes a participant thought she knew what her creative expression was, but was surprised to discover during the interview process that another activity was much more of a metaphor and expression of her relationship with her parents. For example, Angela believed art and writing were her creative expressions, only to discover during the interview that her flower garden truly expressed the continuing presence of her loved ones. Dorothy had never considered any form of creative expression with regard to the loss of her parents. During the interview she tearfully realized living in her parents' home and keeping it up was a way to keep their memory and presence alive. Evelyn experienced an epiphany when she noted, "I cook huge meals. This is silly, but I just thought of it. …I do this for my mother-in-law…".

As we work through our losses and are charged with finding meaning, we are engaging in the creative process. And as in any creative process, we may think we know where we are headed, but more often than not this process of analyzing and ordering will result in something that surprises us, not only by its emergence, but by the very rightness of its expression.

CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSION

Finding Meaning Through the Creative Process

We don't find meaning in loss and then create something – we find meaning through the creative process (Fisher & Specht, 1999). The creative result is more than just an end in itself – the process is part of the meaning-making, the result is a metaphor for the meaning – a way of remembering and celebrating the life of the lost loved one – a way of affirming the values of the one who is lost as good and worthy of continuation in our lives – a way of continuing to have a relationship with our lost loved one.

We, as surviving adult daughters, are the connection between the past – our parents – and the future – our children, nieces, and nephews. When our loved one dies, not only do we search for meaning in their death and new meaning for our life without their physical presence, we often feel a need to find that their life had meaning and purpose. As we examine our lives without their presence we may discover ways to continue those values and activities through our lives. Perhaps this act of finding ways to continue the bonds with our deceased parents is how we are able to move beyond the pain of loss.

Our society erects monuments and tombstones to remember the dead. We line highways and country lanes with crosses and flowers at the place where our loved one died. Strangers and friends visit walls of remembrance in Oklahoma City and New York City and other sites where large numbers of people died. If these lives came and went and had no meaning, then it's just possible that our life has no meaning or purpose or continuance either. As a culture we work very hard to remember the dead while we simultaneously tell the grieving to get on with life. Humans may act as though they want to live forever, but just

as the Pharaohs of Egypt wanted their names remembered for eternity, we want to be remembered and to have mattered or made a difference to someone.

My father loved gardening. As he grew older he could no longer manage a large garden, but he always managed to grow a few tomato plants. When I moved across country to attend graduate school I began growing tomatoes for a couple of reasons: (1) I love to eat fresh tomatoes, and (2) it was a great way to connect with my father. He loved giving me advice on the best fertilizers and the tastiest varieties. Today when I plant tomatoes I not only remember the good times I shared with Daddy and the connection I felt with him as we grew our plants together, I'm also demonstrating that planting tomatoes – which was enjoyed and practiced by my father – continues to be important in my life. The tomato plant becomes a symbol, a representation or metaphor, for my father's continued presence in the world. It represents that the choices he made and the life he lived continue to matter. This planting of tomatoes validates his life by metaphorically saying his life mattered and made a difference in my life. In fact, his life continues to have meaning for me today.

Finding meaning in loss is not just about finding meaning after our lives have been shattered by the loss and discovering how our lives are changed and transformed by the loss, it's also about finding meaning in the life of the lost loved one and finding a way to perpetuate that meaning and relationship in our lives. When the lost one lived among us the meaning was with us, albeit invisible and for the most part taken for granted. We find ourselves confronted with the question of how to go on without their meaning (and presence) to sustain ours. Death and loss is not just about getting over a loss and moving on. It's about a relationship that's been severed and finding a way to incorporate that loss and the meanings we discover into our lives. We must find ways to continue the meaning and purpose behind our relationship with the deceased and in some cases, find ways to resolve

unfinished business so that we can settle issues that existed in that relationship. If we are truly charged with remembering, then there are many ways to creatively remember.

Using Creative Expression to Construct Personal Meaning

The women in this study did use creative expression to construct meaning after the deaths of their parents. Their stories illustrate the many ways in which we remember and find ways to share what our parents meant to us and to incorporate their values, traditions, and rituals into our lives and the lives of their descendants.

Storytelling

Storytelling is a conscious way we can tell their story and our own. In keeping with the literature on grief and coping, many of the women did use storytelling as a way to construct meaning from personal loss. Brenda, Charlotte, Evelyn, and Dorothy actively tell stories about their parents to their children. Angela used writing to tell the story of the loss of her father. The very act of participating in this study was a way for the women to share their stories of loss and meaning. As we tell the external and internal details of our narratives, we often discover the meaning through reflection. Reflexive narratives help us to put it all together as we work to figure out what it all means (Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002). It is possible that over time these reflexive narratives have helped the women in this study see ways in which they continue the presence of the parents in their lives.

Assuming Behaviors and Roles

Brenda and Charlotte have assumed many of the roles their mother filled. They fill in as grandmother for their nieces and nephews. Brenda, as the oldest, feels she has now become the one in charge. "You feel like you've got to fix everything." Charlotte sees herself incorporating her mother's sayings and ways of responding. "I catch myself doing things or saying things that Mother did." Greta didn't get to know her parents as an adult,

however she has found ways to assume the roles she remembers. "I still try to find the good [in people]; I give people chance after chance. And I think that's something that …comes from your parents." Evelyn has used mothering as a way to continue her mother's presence in her life, even though she admits she probably acts more like her father. "I did it because I was mothered, not like I did it necessarily, but this was a part of her I had to honor." And Dorothy still hears her mother's voice as she cleans the house her parents loved. "Get the woodwork. Get the woodwork."

Sharing Wisdom

Sharing the wisdom of parents is closely related to storytelling and assuming roles and behaviors, but with a more specific aim. Brenda and Charlotte both find themselves telling their children and grandchildren things their mother shared with them. Recently Charlotte told me she has started writing a journal of her mother's stories and words of wisdom. This is a new form of creative expression for Charlotte, who at the time of the original interview three years ago told me she had no hobbies other than reading. Even Greta tells her children the values and ideals she remembers were important to her parents.

Symbolizing Their Presence

Symbolizing Their Presence was a sub-theme that was expressed by all of the women in some form. Brenda and Charlotte both find ways to have their mother's bowls and decorative objects on the table at family gatherings. Charlotte views the family Fourth of July celebration as a continuation of a happy time with her parents. Sometimes lost family members are remembered humorously. Evelyn remembers her mother-in-law by including underwear in the family Christmas stockings each year. Dorothy has clung to broken appliances that her mother loved even though she knows she needs to get rid of them. Both Dorothy and Angela find their mothers present in the flowers in their gardens.

Making Them Proud

Sometimes making them proud can work for or against the surviving daughter. The women who expressed this sub-theme saw this as a positive expression. As Brenda said, "They wouldn't want us to sit down, grieve, and just …it's like you want to make them proud of you." Fran returned to college and finished her undergraduate degree because she knew her father wanted her to graduate from college. Evelyn knew her mother always supported the decisions of her children, and would've been very proud of her two daughters and her educational achievements. Angela felt driven to leave home at the age of 18 because she thought that's what her father expected. She also thought she had to become a scientist or a doctor because of her father's expectations. It was only after she was able to recognize what her talents and desires were that she was able to let go of what she thought her father expected.

Continuing Traditions

Many of the women worked to continue the traditions they celebrated with their parents and/or extended family. Charlotte and Brenda see value in getting together with extended family each year. This is a special way to be connected to their parents and the relatives who were part of their lives. Evelyn passed on games and songs to her daughters that her mother shared with her. "It's a comfort thing, too. Just to hear those words again. The kids found it comforting. …It's very much a part of her."

New Directions

All of the women discovered they are engaging in new activities or heading in new directions as a result of the loss of their parents. Brenda and Charlotte travel with their families in part because their mother always wanted to travel and died before she was able to do so. Greta began her doctoral studies because she thought she could move ahead

professionally and make more money. This no longer motivates her studies. She plans to write her dissertation on the topic of traumatic loss and already sees the process as helping her to understand her own situation and find meaning in the losses and tragedies that have filled her life. Dorothy found some understanding of her father's alcoholism when she chose to get a degree in substance abuse counseling. She now sees this choice of major may have been made subconsciously because of her father. Fran and Evelyn could suddenly cook foods and meals they could never cook before. As Fran noted, "But after she died, I could do things I never could do. It was like I could cook now like my mother." Evelyn's experience was almost identical after the death of her mother-in-law. "I could not make cream pies. …But after she died… it seemed like she left it to me. …I could do it all after she was gone and had never done it before." And Angela, who never gardened before, now has the people she loves growing in her beautiful flower and rose garden.

Relationship to Theory

It is not the purpose of this study to analyze the women's responses from a psychological perspective, however based on their responses it appears that while there are common themes that emerged from their stories of loss, the process is individual. Freud's (1917, 1957) intrapsychic model of mourning sees personal transformation after loss as a private, internal process. These seven women experienced personal transformation not only as a part of a private, internal process, but also within a social and relational context. The women have found a variety of ways to continue having a relationship with their lost parents, which continues to evolve over time.

Stage Models

The women in this study were not asked whether or not they experienced any of the Kübler-Ross (1969) five stages of grieving, but in telling their stories they did refer to

feelings that are among the five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Every stage was not mentioned by each of the women. This does support Kübler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) position that not everyone experiences all of the stages, and the stages are a useful tool and "part of the framework that makes up our learning to live with the one we lost" (p. 7). It is interesting that this is phrased as "learning to live with the one we lost" because it implies a continuing bond rather than forgetting and moving on. This view aligns with the continuing bonds thesis that it is important to hold on to the relationship with the deceased (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996; Walter, 1999; Wortman & Silver, 1989).

Task Models

The themes of Relationship: Attachment and Loss, Stories of Loss: Realizing They are Gone, Changes: Life is Different Now, Importance of Family: Meaning-Making in the Context of Relationship, and Creative Expression After Loss: They Are With Me have similarities to the themes of Coping, Affect, Change, Details, and Relationship found in Muller and Thompson's (2003, July) study of grief after bereavement. Muller and Thompson described these themes as existing in relationship to an additional theme of Time. While their study did not look at creative expression after loss, it is noteworthy that when survivors tell their stories of loss it generally includes themes of relationship to the deceased, how they came to terms with or accepted/coped with the loss, and changes brought about by the loss. In this study details of the loss are subsumed under the theme Stories of Loss.

The theme of Stories of Loss: Realizing They are Gone includes the three stages or tasks that some theorists say must be accomplished in order to successfully complete the grieving process, i.e., intellectually and emotionally accept the loss, and change our model of our inner and outer world to align with this new reality (Parkes & Weiss, 1983; Viederman, 1989). All seven of the women in this study have accepted the loss of their parents

intellectually and emotionally. Most of the women have been able to reconcile their model of how the world works with the loss of their parents. It's not clear whether Greta has done this yet as she appears to continue to struggle to fill the emptiness left by the loss of her parents. She has not been able to find a close surrogate parent, the support of extended family, or, until recently, a close friend. Fran is still working on aligning her internal model of reality with the loss of her mother-in-law, Marian. It has only been two years since Marian's death. It may be that time is a component of this third step toward successful completion of the grieving process. However, based on the stories told by the women in this study, I would argue that the process of grieving is ongoing and the sense we make, or the reconciliation of our models of internal and external reality, changes over time.

Colin Murray Parkes' (1996) psychosocial transitions describe the phases of grief as shock/numbness, yearning/searching, disorganization/despair, and reorganization. Several of the women in this study used the terms *shock* and *numb* to describe their reaction to the death of their parent.

Fran: So it was quite a shock. We knew, for three years, we'd known something was wrong… I guess I was pretty numb. Pretty lost. Felt guilty for not being there. I felt guilty that I'd stayed away. I just remember feeling numb.
… and she'd been fine talking to us in the hospital this whole time. So, it was a shock. We didn't have time to prepare for that one. It was definitely a shock.

Evelyn: Losing my mother such a shock. She'd been ill. I think we knew that she'd not felt well for a number of years, but I had been gone… [When she died] I was really so numb.

Charlotte: Of course, her illness drug out so long, by the time she passed away some of that shock and devastation had gone but it was replaced with the deep sense of sadness and loss, emptiness.

Angela: About how I had seemed to be just numb and distant and how she was glad to see me begin, and this was about six months later, I was beginning to seem like myself again.

While none of the women used the terms yearning, searching, disorganization, despair, or reorganization, there is some evidence they did experience these phases as they worked to find meaning in their loss.

Brenda: Something would happen to me, like I did something good… so I'd pick up the phone to call her old number. That's another thing that bothered me, that I think you missed the most, is knowing that there's somebody in the world who loves you. …I was kind of lost for a while because I didn't know how to do it. …But all in all their living and dying has changed my life.

Charlotte: When they died I realized I had to take control of my life. … Bill and I had a terrible time after our marriage. With the death of Mother our life changed. …Sometime, I think, when we were in Germany, we started talking about Mother, I think is when it started changing.

Fran: And I remember about three months after, it really hit me that weekend… it took me that long for it to finally sink in that he wasn't coming back. …I felt orphaned. …You can't rely on what's supposed to be… And I went back to why, why again. …But I know there's a reason. …Maybe it's made me a stronger person.

Dorothy: Even though I had taken on the responsibility of the adult, I didn't feel like it until after she died.

Evelyn: I was so sad because really the stabilizing force of my life was going. …It was a year later he remarried. And the woman he married didn't care for me a lot and wasn't welcoming so that I wanted to come home. …There was no place to take those children to that would've been my home, my mother to share them.

Greta: On the way to the hospital… all I wanted to know was if my parents were dead. …I didn't start dealing with it until my late twenties. Because you know …you miss (tears) all the stuff that you missed like graduation and kids, and so you start going "I don't have a mom to call or a dad to call or anything." …And it's been hard because I've lost all my grandparents and everything… And you can't explain the loneliness to anyone.

The themes that emerged from this study appear to parallel the four stages of Worden's (1991) task model: accept the reality of loss, work through the pain of grief, adjust to an environment without the deceased, and to emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life. It appears these seven women have experienced Worden's stages of the grieving

process. This has taken months, and sometimes years. Most of the women have or are continuing to work through the pain of grief. Fran continues to adjust to the absence of her mother-in-law, Marian. All of the women are working to move forward with life. It isn't clear from this study if the women have addressed Doka's (1997) fifth stage of "rebuilding philosophical or faith systems challenged by the loss" (p. 253). The women weren't asked specifically about their faith or the philosophical aspects of their experiences. Some of the women did mention the importance of faith in coping with loss. This aspect of the experience of loss should be explored in future studies.

Meaning Reconstruction and Transformative Learning

We, as human beings, continually work to figure out what the events in our lives signify or mean (Berman, 1991). Finding meaning is central to learning in adulthood (Merriam & Heuer, 1996; Mezirow, 1978). Therefore, it is natural that when we experience a major loss, such as the death of a parent, we experience a loss of meaning and disruption of lifestory, or what Janoff-Bulman (1992) refers to as "shattered assumptions" about how the world works and our place in it. There is evidence that the women in this study experienced meaning reconstruction in its three contexts of sense-making, benefit-finding, and identity reconstruction (Neimeyer, 2001a; Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002).

Often the women were surprised at the meanings they discovered as they related their stories of loss. While they did indicate they made some conscious efforts to understand their loss and what the loss meant to them (Mezirow, 1978), it seems that often such critical reflection wasn't necessary for a meaning transformation to occur (E. W. Taylor, 1997). Emotions or feelings work together with critical reflection, thus nonconcious and affective learning work together with our conscious efforts to bring about understanding (E. W. Taylor, 1997).

Relationships with family and friends were important to all seven women when it came to coping with their loss and finding meaning and direction for their lives. This is consistent with Taylor's (1997) conclusion that relationships play an important, perhaps necessary, role in perspective transformation or meaning-making. Greta, who has little social support from family and friends, has had a more difficult time dealing with her losses. Meaning-making and perspective transformation are important to Greta. She hopes the process of researching and writing her dissertation will help move her forward in her search for meaning and direction in life.

Story-Action Model and Transformative Learning

Harvey's (2000) Story-Action model uses storytelling as an approach to deal with loss. He sees storytelling as leading to some type of constructive action whereby we use our losses to help others who suffer. This model combines account-making and social interaction or confiding, which involves thinking and feeling. Harvey, Weber, and Orbuch (1990) view this combination as essential to the healing process after major loss. The Story-Action model is similar to Taylor's (1997) concept of Collective Unconscious as part of the transformative learning process. Taylor defines collective unconscious as looking beyond self toward others. The actual meaning a person gains from the process of perspective transformation may be exhibited by empathy and altruism (Courtenay, Merriam, & Reeves, 1998; E. W. Taylor, 1997).

Each of the seven women in this study has found ways to constructively address their loss. They appear to have followed the Story-Action model's progression from (1) the experience of a major loss to (2) creating a story/understanding of the loss to (3) telling/sharing this story with people who care to (4) a change in identity to (5) an action or activity that constructively addresses their loss (Harvey, 2000).

Role of Time

Time is an important component to the task of finding meaning after loss. Years have passed since the parents of the women in this study died. For a few of the women it's been less than 10 years since the second parent died.

Angela	36 years since her father's death	2 years since her mother's death
Evelyn	31 years since her mother's death	6 years since her father's death
Fran	27 years since her father's death	22 years since her mother's death
Greta	25 years since her parents' deaths	
Dorothy	23 years since her father's death	13 years since her mother's death
Charlotte	21 years since her mother's death	18 years since her father's death
Brenda	21 years since her mother's death	18 years since her father's death
Marsha	12.5 years since her father's death	10 years since her mother's death

It's been five and a half years since Evelyn's mother-in-law died and two and a half years since Fran's mother-in-law died. These women have had years to work through the loss of their parents, but they wanted to share their stories with me. While the acute pain associated with the initial loss is no longer present, all of the women expressed emotion, i.e. tears or a catch in the throat, at some point while sharing their stories. It is likely how they tell their stories has changed over the years, especially with regard to the meanings they find. Early stories of loss rely on external narratives or the external details of the loss. Subsequent narratives will include internal details or feelings, attitudes, etc. This can lead to reflexive narratives, which help the storyteller as she works to figure out what it all means (Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002). The details they shared with me are important because this is the state of their stories of loss today. This is where they are in their search for meaning now. The

story and the meanings they ascribe to their experiences may continue to change over time (Romanoff, 2001).

Future Study

There are several areas that could benefit from future study. It is not clear from the present study if the story of the loss of the second parent is shorter because the surviving adult daughter had some understanding of what the loss and grieving experience might entail. Does some of the meaning derived from the loss of the first parent carry over into the experience of losing the second parent?

The present study consisted of women who had lost both parents. One woman, Helen, was interviewed who had lost only one parent. She stated she felt like she was adult before the death of her father and felt no different when her father died. The women included in this study were all surprised that they suddenly felt like an adult after the death of the second parent, even though they had previously considered themselves adults. I decided to limit the present study to women who had lost both parents and did not include Helen's interview in this study. It could be useful to conduct a similar study to answer the question of whether surviving adult daughters use creative expression after the loss of the first parent and perhaps compare the findings with the findings of the present study.

What happens if a survivor is unable to find meaning in the life of their lost loved one? Does this imply the survivor won't or can't successfully transition through bereavement? This is another question for future research.

Men were not included in the present study in order to narrow the parameters of the phenomenon, the loss of both parents, to a single gender. This study should be replicated using men between the ages of 35 and 60 who have lost one or both parents.

Implications

While the findings of this qualitative study cannot be generalized, these women did creatively incorporate the meanings they discovered as a result of the loss of their parents into their lives and the lives of their families. The women used a variety of ways to continue their relationship with one or both of their parents, however an individual may not choose to maintain a relationship with the deceased when the relationship was painful or abusive. The stories the women told about the death of the parent with whom they more closely identified were longer than the stories about the other parent. Most of the stories, creative expressions, and ways to maintain continuing bonds were related to the parent that the surviving daughter felt closest to during life. Most often this longer story was also about the death of the first parent. The exception to this was Dorothy. Her father died first, and she described him as abusive. Angela closely identified with her father, even though she described their relationship as difficult and conflicted. She was not close to her mother at the time of her father's death. Fran, too, was especially close to her father and only later developed a relationship with her mother. Brenda, Charlotte, and Evelyn talked about the close relationship they had with their mothers. Brenda and Charlotte had a good relationship with their father, but identified closely with their mother. Evelyn was not close to her father after her mother's death. Greta talked about her mother much more than she did about her relationship with her father, even though she lost them at the same time. This is consistent with research, which links the intensity of grief and adjustment to a loss with the nature of the emotional bond with the deceased (Levy, Martinkowski, & Derby, 1994; Meshot & Leitner, 1993; Moss, Resch, & Moss, 1997; Muller & Thompson, 2003, July; S. S. Rubin, 1992). This study suggests the nature of the bond with the deceased also affects whether there will be creative expression as part of the meaning-making process and the maintenance

of a continuing bond with the deceased. Regardless of the quality of relationship, the death of a parent may be indeed "…be a significant and lasting event in adult daughters' lives" (Kerr, 1994, p. 347).

Professional counseling may be useful when survivors experience difficulty during the grief and mourning process. Dorothy sought counseling during her mother's illness to resolve the love/hate feelings she experienced toward her mother. She was also able to resolve some of her issues with her father. She said,

> The counseling really opened up the way to forgiveness. I had to forgive my mother. I had to forgive my father. Before counseling his picture was face-down, now I can set it up, look at it, talk to it, and forgive him.

Charlotte found counseling helpful when she got stuck in "anger mode" after her mother's death. Fran visited a counselor once after her mother-in-law's death, but it helped her and her husband move forward and begin talking about Marian. The other women did not seek counseling after the death of their parents. Most people do not. With or without professional counseling, these seven women have been able to discover meaning in their loss and find a form of creative expression that has allowed them to remain in relationship with their parents.

Professional counselors employ a variety of strategies and techniques to help their grieving clients deal with loss. This study suggests that creative expression within the meaning-making process cannot necessarily be forced or planned. Telling our story many times to those who care may help us reflect and discover meaning in our narratives. This, combined with time and nonconscious learning, may result in serendipity – a creative expression or metaphor for the meaning we've discovered. This creative result can come unexpected and is often, a perfect fit for who we are and the life we live.

Meaning-making and creative expression don't happen according to a timeline or schedule. There may be similarities in the process for each person, but the journey is tailored for each individual. The meanings we find and the expressions we create are likely to grow and change over time. We will experience new losses and try to find meaning in these new losses, as well as the losses that have gone before. It is ongoing. It is who we are.

Marsha – 2006

Researching and writing this dissertation has been a wonderful part of my search for meaning. The women in this study have helped me realize that my feelings and experiences of loss are part of the process of creating a life without the physical presence of my parents. They have exhibited the amazing ability of the human spirit and mind to create meaningful connections with a lost loved one as part of the process of loss recovery and meaning-making.

Daddy and Mother have been gone 12 and 10 years, respectively. It seems like yesterday they were here, not over a decade ago. Whenever I plant anything in my garden I feel connected to Daddy. He still helps me repair small items around my house and identify potential car problems by listening to the sounds my car makes. Mother helps me in the kitchen and encourages me in whatever new project I decide to tackle. Whenever I sing or perform I think about them and how proud they were of my talents and abilities. I miss seeing them in the audience.

Writing scenes from my life with my parents helps me understand who I am in the context of my relationship with them. It also helps me understand them. I find connections with them that are important to me. Carrying the memory of my parents forward seems important. They live on in me as I incorporate and embody the values and ideals they held dear. They are with me. Their influence lives on.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discover if surviving adult daughters use forms of creative expression other than or in addition to narrative and storytelling processes to discover how their lives are changed and transformed after their parents' deaths, the meaning in the lives lived by their parents, and ways to perpetuate those meanings and relationships in their lives. In order to answer this question, it was necessary to study the life experiences of such women. A qualitative research design using the phenomenological method of depth interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) was used to explore how/if participants construct personal meaning after the loss of one or both parents and whether the participants used narrative and storytelling processes or other forms of creative expression to construct or convey such meaning. An examination and analysis of these women's stories of their lived experience of loss and their efforts to make meaning out of this loss adds to our understanding of the process of meaning-making and the role creative expression may play that process.

Phenomenology: A Design for Studying Life Experiences

A research question that seeks to understand how individuals experience a common phenomenon can best be addressed using a phenomenological research design. It seeks to capture the "essence" of that experience by reducing the meaning the individual ascribes to the experience to a few statements (Creswell, 1998; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). Spiegelberg (1994) notes,

> On all levels the phenomenological approach is opposed to explanatory hypothesis; it confines itself to the direct evidence of intuitive seeing. A more positive character of the phenomenological approach is that it constitutes a determined attempt to enrich the world of our experience by bringing out hitherto neglected aspects of this experience. (p. 717)

The phenomenon or common experience shared by the participants in this study is the death of both parents. In the words of Augustine, "Don't go abroad. Truth dwells inside man [woman]" (Spiegelberg, 1994, p. 81, brackets added).

Origins of Phenomenology

Phenomenology comes from the Greek words phainomenon meaning an "appearance" and logos meaning "reason" or "word" or "reasoned inquiry" (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). The "appearance" in phenomenology is "anything of which one is conscious. Anything at all which appears to consciousness is a legitimate area of philosophical investigation" (p. 3).

The philosophy of phenomenology rejects the philosophical doctrine of positivism. Auguste Comte (1798-1857) developed positivism to replace theology and metaphysics. Positivism contends, "that sense perceptions are the only admissible basis of human knowledge and precise thought. [It depends on] a hierarchy of the sciences beginning with mathematics and culminating with sociology" (Berube, 1985, p. 967). The anti-positivists, inspired by the German romantic movement, "recognized the life experience of humans, the emotional and vital feeling of life and the engagement that humans have with others and the world" as a valid area of investigation and knowledge (Polkinghorne, 1983; Tesch, 1990, p. 21).

Edmund Husserl, a major figure in the history of phenomenological philosophy, adopted transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). In transcendental phenomenology the researcher sets aside prejudgments about the phenomenon, relies on

intuition, imagination, and universal structures to get a picture of the experience, and uses a systematic method of analysis such as those developed by Clark Moustakas (Creswell, 1998). In addition to Moustakas, Paul Colaizzi, William and Constance Fischer, Rolf von Eckartsberg, and Amedio Giorgi were formulators of phenomenological methodology in psychology (Tesch, 1990).

What is Phenomenology?

Basically phenomenology, as used in qualitative research, identifies and describes the life experiences of individuals, or participants. These life experiences are studied from the participants' point of view (Schwandt, 2001). Moustakas (1994) defines a phenomenological study as describing "the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon (or topic or concept) for several individuals…the researcher reduces the experiences to a central meaning or 'essence' of the experience" (Creswell, 1998, p. 236).

Schwandt (2001) notes

> …the two major variants of phenomenology that are manifest in contemporary qualitative methodologies are hermeneutic and existential. [Existential phenomenology] is more oriented toward describing the experiences of everyday life as it is internalized in the subjective consciousness of individuals. (p. 192)

Stewart and Mickunas (1990) discuss four themes that characterize phenomenological philosophy: "a return to the traditional tasks of philosophy, the search for a philosophy without presuppositions, the intentionality of consciousness, and the refusal of the subject-object dichotomy" (p. 5).

Intentionality refers to the view that there is a "fundamental interaction of mind and world, subject and object" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 131). The subject-object dichotomy sees subjects as standing apart from objects or the world. The subject has the ability "to have a purely theoretical, contemplative, rational, or intellectual grasp of objects (including both self and the world)" (p. 243). According to Schwandt phenomenologists argue the

> …fundamental relationship of self to world (human agency) is actually one of engagement…Views of human agency as embodied, of self as dialogical, of meaning as constructed in interaction, and of knowledge as something we participate in (vs. something we acquire as individuals through cognitive mechanisms of input and processing) all follow from…criticisms of the disengaged S-O relationship. (p. 244)

Methodology of Phenomenology

The inquiry procedures of phenomenology use a psychological approach. According to Giorgi (1975), Moustakas (1994), and Polkinghorne (1989) psychologists look for psychological themes to discover meaning. Psychologists may also include themselves in their research study (Creswell, 1998). Several philosophical perspectives provide the foundation for phenomenological studies. These originated in the 1930s with the writings of Husserl. These perceptions include:

1. The researcher uses a broader perspective than traditional empirical, quantitative science.
2. The researcher suspends preconceptions of the experience.
3. The researcher experiences an object through the senses as well as sees it as real.
4. The research reports the meaning the individual ascribes to the experience in a few statements to capture the "essence" of the experience. (Creswell, 1998; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990).

Use of a Broader Perspective than Empirical, Quantitative Science

The process of gathering information in a phenomenological study centers on conducting depth interviews with 5-10 participants (Tesch, 1994). These participants become what Rubin and Rubin (2005) refer to as "conversational partners."

> The term *conversational partner* also emphasizes the uniqueness of each person with whom you talk, his or her distinct knowledge, and the different ways in which he or she interacts with you. Some conversational partners are self-revelatory, others more restrained and formalistic. Some need prodding to elaborate; others won't stop talking. Some have keen memories and provide lots of evidence, whereas others speak tentatively or are given to speculative conclusions. (p. 14)

Polkinghorne (1989) includes accumulating information from descriptions of the experience from sources outside the framework of the study such as novelists, poets, painters, and choreographers (Creswell, 1998). The phenomenon studied is a lived experience that has

been shared by the participants in the study. The lived experience is usually expressed as a psychological concept such as love, anger, grief, loss, etc. (Creswell, 1998).

Suspension of Preconceptions About the Phenomenon

The researcher begins with the content of consciousness or the content of the interviews. It is not the job of the researcher to decide what is real or not real. Regardless of the content of consciousness, it is considered valid data (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). The phenomenological study seeks to "discover the inherent essences of appearance…An appearance is anything of which one is conscious…Moreover, an appearance is a manifestation of the essence of that of which it is the appearance" (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 3).

Use of Researcher's Own Senses

Colaizzi makes a distinction between researchers who use their own experiences as data and those who use interviews from many participants. He calls the former a reflexive type of phenomenology and the latter empirical (Tesch, 1990).

Fischer, in Valle and King, (1978) says,

> As an empirical phenomenological psychologist, however, I understand empirical to mean that the researcher is open to all perceivable dimensions and profiles of the phenomenon that is being researched. Hence, the experiences of the subjects, as well as those of the researcher, are…acknowledged as potentially informative. (Tesch, 1990, p. 34)

Rubin and Rubin (2005) regard the researcher and participant as partners in the study regardless of the type of qualitative interview.

Reporting the Meaning or Essence of the Experience

Once the data have been gathered, the researcher begins the analysis or reduction stage of the study. There are several steps involved in the analysis of the data. The first step is called epoche or bracketing. The researcher tries, as much as is humanly possible, to set

aside "all preconceived experiences to best understand the experiences of the participants in the study" (Creswell, 1998, p. 235). The second step is horizonalization of the data. The "researcher lists every significant statement relevant to the topic and gives it equal value" (Creswell, 1998, p. 235; Moustakas, 1994). In the third step, the researcher clusters statements into themes or meaning units and removes any overlapping or repetitive statements (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

The goal of the phenomenologist is to reduce the "what" (textual) and "how" (structural) of the experience to a brief description that characterizes the experiences of all the study participants. "All individuals experience it; hence, it is invariant, and it is a reduction to the 'essentials' of the experience" (Creswell, 1998, p. 235; Moustakas, 1994).

Textual description and structural analysis follow the first three steps in the analysis of the data. In the textual description "the researcher writes about what was experienced, a description of the meaning the individuals have experienced" (p. 237).

The structural analysis follows the textual description. The researcher writes "how" the participants experienced the phenomenon. Structural analysis is also called imaginative variation. It "involves seeking all possible meanings, seeking divergent perspectives, and varying the frames of reference about the phenomenon or using imaginative variation" (p. 235).

Verification of Data Analysis

Verification is the final stage of data analysis. Creswell (1998) finds phenomenologists generally view verification and standards as related to the researcher's interpretation.

> To illustrate different conceptions of verification in psychological approaches to phenomenology, neither empirical nor transcendental phenomenologists place substantial emphasis on verification beyond the perspective of the researcher. (p. 207)

However, Moustakas (1994, in Creswell, 1998) does offer a verification methodology of sorts.

> One must reflect, first, on the meaning of the experience for oneself; then, one must turn outward, to those being interviewed, and establish "intersubjective validity," the testing out of this understanding with other person's through a back-and-forth social interaction. (p. 207)

Dukes (1984, in Creswell, 1998) recommends giving the data to a different researcher for confirmation. The second researcher looks for identical patterns. The researcher notes the logic of the experience and examines how it agrees with his/her experience. Do the patterns fit together in a logical manner? Could the elements of the patterns be rearranged into an entirely different pattern? Finally, can the researcher subsume the results under other data?

Participants

The participants in this study are women, ages 35 to 60 years, who have lost both parents. These women were at least two years into the bereavement process. Seven participants were identified using a sample of convenience consisting of friends and colleagues and referrals from initial contacts. The age range of 35 to 60 years was used because this period has been identified as the developmental phase of creativity when many adults are motivated to create meaning in their lives.

Cohen (1998; , 2001b) posits human beings enter a phase of midlife re-evaluation "typically occurring in our 40s and 50s" (Cohen, 2001a, p. 53). His four developmental phases of creativity are: midlife re-evaluation, liberation, summing-up, and encore. These phases "shape the way our creative energy grows and the way we express it in the second half of life (Cohen, 1998, 2001b)" (Cohen, 2001a, p. 53).

Cohen (2001a) defines the midlife re-evaluation phase as follows:

> In this phase, typically occurring in our 40s and 50s, creative expression is intensified by a sense of crisis or quest. Although this phase is often characterized as the "midlife crisis," a more accurate description would be that most adults are motivated by quest energy to re-evaluate their lives and work and make them more gratifying. The midlife re-evaluation phase combines the capacity for insightful reflections with a powerful desire to create meaning in life. (p. 53)

Women who have lost one or both parents during or prior to midlife may find this experience of loss an additional incentive to create meaning at this stage of life.

Study Methodology

After identifying the participants, each woman was interviewed in her home or other location of her choice. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), conducting interviews in a natural setting may minimize observer effect on the participant. Each participant was given and asked to sign a confidentiality and informed consent form. Although a minimum of two-years must have passed since the participants lost their parents, and it was anticipated they were no longer experiencing intense grief, a list of counseling service providers was offered in the event they should feel the need for counseling after sharing their story.

Open-ended interviews were modeled "after a conversation between two trusting parties rather than on a formal question and answer session between a researcher and respondent" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 35). Open-ended interviews, using a loosely structured interview guide, allow the women to tell their own stories of loss from their personal frame of reference. Telling their stories in their own words enables the women to share their lived-experience of loss, making it possible for the researcher to capture the essence of their experiences (Tesch, 1990).

The interviews lasted generally between one to one and one-half hours. The interviews were audio taped. The anonymity of the participants is maintained by limiting access to the audiotapes to the principal researcher and using a pseudonym for each

participant in all transcriptions of the tapes. The tapes will be erased after the research study has been completed.

The researcher transcribed the interview tapes and compared the transcriptions with the tapes in order to verify accuracy by listening to each tape while reading the transcript. Transcriptions of the interviews were coded and analyzed for themes.

Data Analysis

Transcription of the interview tapes allows the researcher to become immersed in the data. The transcripts were read many times and analyzed in depth to discover possible themes, patterns, and categories. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), "Analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what to tell others" (p. 157). Themes are the concepts or theories that emerge from the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Coding categories were developed after analyzing the emergent themes. Strategies for developing coding categories included examining the transcripts for regularities, patterns, and topics and finding words or phrases that were descriptive of these patterns and topics (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).These codes may be looked upon as topical areas. Examples of coding categories include: setting/context codes, perspectives held by subjects, subjects' ways of thinking about people and objects, process codes, activity codes, strategy codes, and relationship and social structure codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, pp. 172-177).

After themes and categories were developed for each participant, the themes and categories were compared with one another to discover commonalities and variations among the participants' stories. The transcripts were sorted by themes. Examples that exemplify the

data findings were identified. These findings were used to formulate conclusions and implications for further study.

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APPENDIX B

Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH CONDUCTED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA – NORMAN CAMPUS

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled Finding Meaning Through Loss: Creative Expression and Grief Recovery. Marsha L. Matthews is the principal investigator and Dr. Courtney Vaughn is the OU faculty sponsor.

The purpose of this research is to find out how the death of one or both parents is perceived by their surviving daughters, aged 35-60. The study will look at coping strategies women use to find meaning in their lives after the loss of a parent in midlife. These strategies may include storytelling and other means to discover meaning. This study will also examine the relationship between creative expression and grief recovery.

Women, ages 35-60, who have lost one or both parents and are at least 2 years into the grieving process will be interviewed about their experience of losing a parent. The interviews will be audiotaped and may last 1½ -2 hours. You have the right to refuse to allow such taping without penalty or prejudice. Follow-up interviews may be needed in the event clarification is needed for responses given during the initial interview.

No foreseeable risks beyond those present in everyday life are anticipated. Participants may have feelings of sadness and grief surface during or as a result of the interview process and realization that some issues may remain unresolved. No specific benefits are anticipated to be associated with this study, however participants may experience insights into their personal grief recovery process and the meaning this loss has in their life. A list of local counseling services will be provided to you at the end of the interview session. Grief counselors may benefit from the results of this study. This study may find evidence that stories and other creative forms of expression increase or provide a resolution for the process of finding meaning as a result of the grief process.

You are free not to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this research study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. To participate in this study, you must be at least 35 years of age and not older than 60 years of age. No compensation is provided for any research-related injury.

You will not be identifiable by name or city in any project publications. You will be identified by a number and pseudonym on the audiotape transcripts and on the audiotape labels. Marsha L. Matthews will personally transcribe all audiotapes to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be used to identify all participants within the research document or other project publications. You will be identifiable only on the audiotapes of the interviews and only insofar as you identify yourself. Marsha L. Matthews will keep the audiotapes in her possession or in her home. The audiotapes will not be made available to non-project personnel.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the committee that protects human participants, at (405) 325-8110. If you have any questions about the research you may contact Marsha L. Matthews at (580) 332-4999 or (580) 310-5528 or Dr. Courtney Vaughn at (405) 325-1518 or (405) 364-4614.

I, _____, hereby

☐ consent ☐ do not consent for my interview to be audiotaped.

I understand my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. I have been informed of the above-described research study with its possible benefits and risks and I have received a copy of this description.

_____

Signature of Participant or Representative Date

The Principal Investigator or her representative has explained the nature and purpose of the above-described research study and the benefits and risks that are involved in this research protocol.

_____

Signature of Principal Investigator Date

APPROVED
JAN 11 2006
OU-NC IRB

APPROVAL
JAN 10 2007
EXPIRES

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Project: Finding Meaning Through Loss: Creative Expression and Grief Recovery

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Tape No.:

Questions:

1. How would you describe your relationship with your deceased parent as
    a. As a child:
    b. As an adolescent:
    c. As an adult:
2. Tell me about your experience of the loss of your mother/father:
3. How did you respond to that?
4. What did it mean to you?
5. How were you able to deal with that?
6. What changes have you experienced?
7. How do you make meaning of the experience of loss?
8. What gives you a sense of meaning, purpose, or new direction?
9. What in your experience has made that possible?
10. How has your experience been expressed in your life?
11. Other:

(Thank individual for participating in this interview. Assure her of confidentiality of responses and potential future interviews. Ask individual to sign IRB Consent Letter.)