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Giving Meaning to Grief: The Role of Rituals and Stories in Coping with Sudden Family Loss

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my younger brother, Jeremy. While I had a best friend during his short t life, it was through his death that I was led on a journey through sibling grief. This journey enabled me to form close relationships with others who have walked a similar path and who have consequently enriched my life.

I would also like to thank my parents who continually supported me and believed in my research. They are two of the strongest people I know, in fact, they are my heroes.

A special thank you goes to my major professor, Dr. Jane Jorgenson, who continually pushed me to go further and deeper with this work. I will forever be grateful for her dedication to this dissertation.

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I seek to better understand the sensemaking process among surviving family members after a tragic loss of a teenage or young adult child. Using social constructionism (Gergen, 1991) as a theoretical framework, I focused on how meanings of loss are constructed through the use of language and other symbols. I specifically looked at the role of family stories and rituals in making sense of the sudden loss as well as how a survivorøs role as a sibling or parent may impact the grieving process. The participants in my research were all members of families in which a child had died unexpectedly in adolescence or young adulthood. I combined multiple in-depth interviews with parents and siblings in each family with episodes of participant-observation. Then I used inductive thematic analysis to examine the patterns of ritualizing in each family, and a process of narrative analysis focusing on the accounts of three siblings and two parents in order to explore how survivors structure their experience in stories.

I found that rituals and artifacts play a significant role in assisting family members in coping with bereavement. Even though previous family rituals and traditions are disrupted by the death, families find ways of creating and enacting new rituals. The invention and adoption of new rituals seems to serve an important role in õsuccessfulö grieving as a way of sustaining bonds with lost loved ones. I also found that survivors, in sharing with me the stories of sudden loss, worked to construct storylines that tie events together by showing how they

are meaningfully, and sometimes causally, connected. In addition, the stories showed how survivors õfind benefitö by reframing painful events as positive and growthful.

Throughout my analysis of rituals and stories, I looked for similarities or differences between the siblingsø and parentsø experiences. One insight to emerge from the study was that bereavement is a very individual event, and the resulting differences in expressions and degrees of grief among different family members can put a strain on the family system. Another key theme that emerged was the protective stance taken by surviving siblings towards their parents after the death of a brother or sister, which sometimes involved minimizing the display of their own emotions. In this sense, the siblings seem to have experienced what the literature has called õprohibited mourning,ö By contrast. parental grief seems to be more socially acknowledged.

This study holds potential benefits for those scholars interested in bereavement as a meaning-making process as well as the effects on the family system. Therapists who treat families might find the insights these participants contribute to be helpful in creating ways to communicate with their clients.

PROLOGUE

March, 2002

My Dadøs best friend sits next to me dialing away on the telephone. *Oh my god…he is trying to get in touch with Mom and Dad. Oh no, please don't let this really be happening.* My parents are out of town, in Ft. Lauderdale, waiting to board a cruise ship the next day. They are out to dinner and unreachable.

õJulia, I told the hotel to have your parents call this hospital number immediately when they return,ö Mr. Duke tells me. *Who is going to answer the phone then*? I look at my older sister, April, and she is crying inconsolably. *Maybe she should tell them since she is the oldest and was left in charge of him, but she can't even speak. If they are going to find out over the phone then those words cannot come from a stranger or even a friend. They need to come from someone who knows the severity those words carry, from someone who loves Jeremy; they have to come from a family member. They have to come from me, his 20 year old sister.*

õApril, do you want me to talk to Mom and Dad when they call?ö

õYes, please, I canøt tell them.ö

õJulia, I will come and get you when your parents call the front desk,ö Mr. Duke informs me. I wait in horror. I know the words I am about to deliver to Mom and Dad are the unthinkable. *How do I say this? With these words, I am going to limit my parents' happiness for the rest of their lives. How will they*

react? He is their only son; their baby. For that matter, how will all of us keep on going? Jeremy is the final puzzle piece to our perfect family.

Ringí ringí ringí

õJulia, are you ready?ö Mr. Duke asks me. õYour Dad is on the phone.ö I stand up on wobbly legs and walk towards the phone at the front desk.

õYou can pick up this receiver when you are ready,ö the nurse tells me. My church pastor and another family friend hold on to me to give their support. My entire body shakes. *No, I can't do this…I can't do this…yes, you have to do this, you have to! It can't come from anyone else. God, please help me do this.*

õDad?ö

õJulia, tell me what is going on. What has happened?ö he asks hurriedly.

Silence threatens to grip me again, but somehow I manage to blurt out, õDad, Jeremy was in a car accident today, and he didnøt make it.ö

After uttering those life-changing words, time stands still. The silence that lasts only a couple of seconds feels like an eternity. *Can those words that I just said really be true? How is my father ever going to be able to look at me the same way again? Will he have the same feelings of disgust towards me that I have for the acquaintance who flippantly informed me? I have just ruined my parents' life.* I hold my breath waiting for the aftermath of my message, expecting the worst.

I hear him take a deep breath and say, õOkay Julia.ö His voice begins to crack. õJeremy is in heaven now, and we had seventeen beautiful years with him.

For that, we can be grateful. Hang on, your mom and I will be home to you and April as soon as we can. Can you do that?ö

õYes sir. Dad, I am so sorry,ö I start to cry into the phone.

õI am too. Iøm sorry weøre not there with you and April right now. I love you so much.ö

õI love you too Dad. Please hurry.ö

õWe will.ö

July, 2003

õYou are putting such a strain on our relationship Daniel. I donøt know what you are being so paranoid about; my parents do not hate you!ö I honestly do not believe my parents hate Daniel, my boyfriend of a year.

õWell, then call your parents to see if we can come over and try to talk this through. I am beginning to resent the division it is creating between us, and I would like to know from them exactly how they feel.ö I make the call. We get in his truck to make the five minute drive to my parentsø house.

I look out the window and see the wind twirling the leaves off the trees and the clouds darkening as we get closer to the house; a storm is brewing. My palms are dripping with sweat as I unlock the front door to my parentsø house, the house where I was raised. õHi Daniel, hi Juliaö my Mom says with an intimation of concern in her eyes. I know she is dreading this conversation just as much as I am. My father walks out of his room still dressed in suit and tie. At this moment, for the first time in my life I feel like a stranger in my own home, an alien, a piece

of the puzzle that is not quite fitting at the moment and needs some reshapingí   Well, here goes the reshapingí

We sit outside on the screen porch. The porch is my favorite place to visit with my family as we look over the beautiful flowers in the yard, watch the dog play, and listen to the water from the bayou rhythmically lap the cypress trees resting on the bank. It is my home, my place of safety and contentment, but today during this conversation between my mother, my father, Daniel and me, that feeling of safety and õfitö would be challenged.

My senses are paralyzed. My Dad sits across the table from me with Daniel and Mom on either side. As the rain begins to pour down I awaken from my daze and think, "Did my Dad really just say that?"

"Daniel, we think you have the power to divide our family. The fact is you are not right for our daughter and no one is happy with the union. Divorce is a terrible thing, and I see that happening to you if you continue this relationship. Don't get us wrong, we know you will be happy with someone else, just not Julia." As the tears roll down my face, my body goes cold. For so long I refused to believe my father felt this way, unyielding to any of Danieløs premonitions. How could I have been so wrong? Some things are better left unsaid, and I knew Daniel would never forget those words. He was wounded, and this was a storm I did not know if our relationship could weather.

With those cutting words, Daniel rose from his chair and said calmly, "Well, if you are certain you feel that way and nothing I can say will prove to you that I am worthy of your daughter then I think it is best for me to go." My heart

drops once again as the love of my life walks out of my house unattended. I donøt know why I canøt run after him and tell my parents how wrong they are about him, but for some reason I stay and try to comfort them, a decision Daniel will never understand.

The door shuts and I turn around sobbing. My Mom is crying telling Dad repeatedly, "But Terry, she loves him. She loves him." It is too late in my mind. Why didn't she speak up a few minutes ago? I will never think of Daniel the same way again. It will always be awkward when he comes over to visit my family. Even though apologies are exchanged later, and it is made clear that Daniel is a permanent fixture in my life, there is nothing he or I could do to squelch the seed of doubt planted that day. The doubt continues to plague me about our future wedding day, a day that is supposed to overflow with joy and excitement. I wake myself with my own tears; our dream for a future is ruined. And because Daniel knows me better than anyone else, he can see it written all over my face.

Over the next two years, Daniel decides to try to stick it out, and makes an effort to show my parents he is worthy of me. However that fateful conversation took its toll on our relationship. I felt constantly stuck in the middle and the discomfort I felt at family functions was obvious. I could forgive my parents, but I could not forget what happened. I began to live a polarized life, becoming a different person in the company of my parents totally diverting any conversation that would yield Danieløs name. He didnøt exist when I was alone with my parents. After much love and seven hard years of trying, Daniel and I went our separate ways permanently. Sometimes I wonder what would have happened had

I responded differently and made a stand against my parents. I also wonder if that conversation would have ever taken place had Jeremy not died.

November, 2004

My sister and I face one another at her kitchen table. The dishes are clean and we are enjoying a piece of pie and coffee.

õDo you think our family has changed since Jeremyøs death?ö I ask her.

õYes, and I think on a large level I grieved more for the way our family has changed than actually for Jeremy. At first of course I grieved more for Jeremy, but now I grieve for the way our family has become. And the way Dad isí the way it just changed everything. The way he has grieved, he has just held so much more inside. It was hard for me to see him go through that. I think it affects us all. I know it affects mom and of course it affects me. But there was a change in everybody, change in me, in mom, in you. I think now my sorrow is not a sorrow for Jeremy, but a sorrow for our family.ö

õYeah, it has rocked us to the core,ö I reply.

õIt was like we all got dropped off in this foreign land and no one could understand each other, and we had to learn a new way of communicating.ö How does a family communicate after loss? Do you really have to find new ways of communicating with each other?

õI wonder if we will ever get to a place where we can see positive outcomes from Jeremyøs death,ö I tell her.

õWell if you see any, let me know. Itøs been two years and all I have seen is heartache and pain. I guess I am just going through my angry phase. Iøm angry

that Jeremyøs not here, Iøm angry at what that has done to our family, and Iøm angry that I have not been able to have a baby.ö

õSo you donøt see any positive progression by us as a family?ö I ask.

õI do, but I definitely donøt think we are where we used to be, and I definitely donøt think we are healed. I think Dad has internalized his grief, and I think you did too, but your healing came through writing. You and Dad grieved in a certain way and Mom and I did things a lot alike. I tried to overcompensate for Jeremyøs death by going too overboard with the foundation we created for him. Dad read all these books, but Iøm not sure if that worked. And I had some real honest and raw feelings that I couldnøt even express to Adams (her husband). I had to talk to a counselor, and I remember being sick about it, just angry. I think Mom went through a little bit of that. But I think you and dad just dealt with it in a different way. He was more about what the books say. You were on an island working through it on your own and didnøt really share it with anyone.

õJulia, if you publish anything for surviving siblings, please tell them that families do change, and that they are not crazy for mourning the loss of the family. Iøve never read anything on that, and nobody prepared me for that.ö

November, 2006

The bayou has always been the one place of escape for me. It offers a safe place to sit, reflect, and most importantly makes me feel at home. The bayou flows directly behind my parentsø house. I feel it beckoning me to come and sit down beside it, watch for turtles, and catch fish. It serves as my one place of solitude where I feel completely alone with my thoughts, and take notice of the

magnificent beauty before me. Many of my tears have dropped into this body of water, while at other times my laughter has echoed off its waves. I think even a high school advanced math book somehow flew off the dock and sank to the bottom. I chose this place to walk beside today because it is my sanctuary, my home, and floods my mind with childhood memories.

On this November day, a wind whips through the water creating small ripples. The cypress trees are ablaze with different shades of red and contrast with the other colors of rust, dark green, and yellow peppered all over the bank. The water reflects their beauty in an impressionistic form. Living in Florida, I forgot what fall looks like. I take a deep breath in; the musty scent of the water fills my nose. The water is a dark shade of gray thanks to the gumbo mud and clay beneath it.

My mind flashes back to a typical July day in Louisiana. Jeremy and I decide to go for a swim to try to escape the sticky humidity. We might as well be in the water because we are going to be wet with sweat regardless. Jeremy and I love to torment our family dachshund, Stretch. "Okay, Julia count to five before you let him go," he says. I hold Stretch in a death grip as I watch Jeremy run as fast as his thirteen-year-old body will let him, down the side of the backyard to the side of the house. In my arms Stretch struggles in agony trying as hard as he can to jump down and sprint after Jeremy.

Oneí twoí three, four, five!" I release Stretch and it looks like I shot a weenie dog out of a cannon. The chase is on. Jeremy rounds the final corner of the house into the backyard with Stretch yelping at his heels. To Stretch's dismay,

Jeremy inevitably makes a sharp ninety degree turn heading straight towards the bayou; Stretch hates to get wet. Jeremy leaps into the bayou with all his might, and a half second later a screeching Stretch jumps in after him. The wind catches Stretch's ears as he hurls through the air and it looks like for a second that he might be able to fly, but inevitably his tootsie roll shaped body plummets head first into the water. The only time Stretch ever willingly jumps into the bayou is when he is chasing Jeremy. That never ceases to be funny to us; we do it so many times I can't believe Stretch doesnøt keel over from exhaustion.

As the years went by, the bayou continued to be a social pastime. I always had my friends over to float on rafts and soak up the sun. At night, Jeremy would go down to the dock with his friends and sneak a cigarette or two. As teenagers we took the bayou's beauty for granted. Now, when I return home and look at the splendor this water beholds, I am dumbfounded at how disposable it was to me growing up. I was truly blessed to live here, and that realization gets clearer and clearer as the years pass.

I take in another breath completely trying to lose myself in the memories, but a sharp pain shoots through me. Much has changed since childhood. Now, Stretch is buried under a stone near the boathouse, and Jeremy is buried across town. Now that I think about it, I feel Jeremy's spirit more here than I do at his graveside. Walking along this bank I can see him jumping in, riding the jet-ski, torturing my friends and me with squirt guns.

Hopefully, the bayou will continue to connect me to the people I love the most; past and present. My family and friends love this water. We spent the

majority of our lives playing in it and it served a crucial role in shaping our relationships. Peace consumes me as I stand here today. This spot, this one place on earth holds so much significance and so many memories. I feel God's presence in this place. I feel His spirit in every wave, tree, snake, turtle, and fish.

I think to myself how far I and my family have come since Jeremyøs death. The ritual of returning to this body of water and feeling his presence here will be something I plan to practice for years to come.

Soon a small rod iron fence will divide the backyard and the bayou. Every precaution will be taken to ensure the safety of the new addition to our family. I anticipate the birth of my sister's first child, and wonder if she or he will enjoy the bayou as much as we did. The circle of life is revolving, and as I think about Jeremy and the memories I share with him here, I also look forward to the memories I will make with my nephew, nieces, and hopefully one day children of my own.

My parents ask me if I would like to go for a boat ride since I am home for the weekend. The trees are changing into the most beautiful hues and it would be a shame to miss it. As we stroll up and down the bayou, I am overcome with emotion. I miss home. Everything about this water is my home; I am so thankful my parents chose to raise me here. Thankful is the word I would use for what I feel; thankful to be so fortunate to be surrounded by such beauty, thankful for all the memories, thankful for my family, and most importantly thankful to my Creator for providing.

As I take one last look over the water before going in to pack my bags to go back to Florida, I can hear the laughter of what once was echoing off the rippled waves, and I smile for what has been and what will be.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I begin this dissertation with my personal narratives in an effort to show the reader how sensemaking after loss can be a narrative process enabling the teller to make the past intelligible and redefine possibilities for the future (Bochner, 2001; DeSalvo, 2001; Eisenberg, 2007; Neimeyer, et. al, 2002). Family stories as well as family rituals are forms of symbolic production through which family members create a shared reality. In this dissertation, I seek to better understand the process of symbolic sensemaking among surviving family members after the sudden death of a young adult child.

Teenage deaths account for 49.5 of the U.S. deaths per 100,000 population per year (Minino, 2010). That means a little over 16,000 families are affected by the loss of a teenager per year and less than 1% of U.S. families have experienced the death of a teenager. Accidents accounted for 48% of these deaths; homicide, 13 %; suicide 11%; cancer, 6%, and heart disease, 3%. At the age of 19, the death rate is 46% higher for boys than for girls. Even though the numbers of teenage deaths is in the lower percentile of U.S. deaths per year, teenage deaths should not be ignored due to the potential life that was lost and the incredible impact on the surviving family members (Minino, 2010).

In this research, I collected and analyzed family stories of loss, including accounts of how loved ones are memorialized in ritual. My goal is to show the

challenges faced by surviving parents and siblings and how family members use symbolic resources to make sense of these unexpected catastrophes.

Narrative is a form of inquiry that both presents a story and ponders the meanings found in the story (Hampl, 1999, p. 33). In my opening story I share the events surrounding my brother, Jeremyøs, death and its reverberations in later family events. My narratives show the systemic nature of loss and how each relationship is reshaped (Hoffman, 1981). My story also illustrates how the writing and telling of narratives can be a way of structuring experiences into meaningful coherence (Coles, 1989; White, 1980). Freeman (1997) believes the past is recreated every time we revisit it in narrative (376). This concept of recreating the past in narrative applies powerfully to the tragic narratives shared in this dissertation. Unfortunately, many people repress memories of traumatic events in the hopes of blocking them out. In reality, they become prisoners to the memories. I have found that writing different versions of this narrative has been a powerful resource for coping by enabling me to õrestoryö in the process of bringing forth new meanings and preferred outcomes (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1993). DeSalvo (2001) explains the impulse to narrate stories of loss. õPeople who write about their loved onesø death are paradoxically engaged in a search for meaning of their loved onesø lives. They want to make a record; they want to describe their loss and their grief. But they want to discover, too, an overarching meaning for this death so that it will not have been for naughtö (p. 191).

The darkness of the presentô loss, death, and sufferingô are important elements in a narrative about loss, but a hope for an optimistic future is crucial.

Narrative is powerful because of the hope the writer and the reader can create. Denzin (1999) concurs, saying a writer should learn how to õwrite a new way, to move from the scenes of memory to the present and back again, to reclaim a revisioned present against a newly understood pastö (p. 568). Through an examination of the past, the teller searches for new meanings and values and thus he or she has the power to look toward the future optimistically. I demonstrate this in my childhood memories with my brother. I can reflect on the memories I shared with him while looking towards the future optimistically.

Among the narratives that will be included in this dissertation is the story of the research process itself, and how it involved some unexpected turns. When I began this research, my aim was to find out from families, specifically surviving siblings, how they are communicating the memory of their deceased loved ones, what these practices or rituals mean to them, and if they find these processes helpful in the grieving experience. However I was forced to make adjustments in the design as the participants in this study set forth different obstacles and challenges when discussing, or preparing to discuss, this sensitive subject matter. I found I had to respond to these shifts in fieldwork relationships and reconsider how to proceed. As I learned, qualitative researchers often make use of õemergent designö where the themes and concepts take unexpected turns and can only be discovered while in the midst of the research (Watt, 2007). õData analysis involves organizing what has been seen, heard, and read so that sense can be made of what is learned. Since analysis takes place throughout the entire research process, a study is shaped and reshaped as a study proceeds, and data is

gradually transformed into findingsö (Watt, 2007, p. 95). Although I began my study with specific questions about siblingsø rituals and memorializing, I found some difficulties in gaining direct access to these processes. Eventually I discovered that participantsø accounts of family rituals were part of a broader story of how survivors look for meaning after a tragic loss. These turns in the research process will be described in more detail in chapter two.

My project is guided by a social constructionist perspective, which emphasizes the idea that humans assign meaning to their experiences through the use of symbols such as language, stories, and rituals (Gergen, 1991). According to family therapist, Lynn Hoffman (1990), social construction theory rejects the idea of an objectively knowable truth. Rather, õsocial construction theory sees the development of knowledge as a social phenomenon and holds that perception can only evolve within a cradle of communication (p. 3).ö From this perspective we might say that it is through communication with others that we develop shared meanings that help us make sense of the world. Social construction theory invites questions, not only about how meanings are produced, but also how we draw on and are constrained by õfoundö or received meanings, and ultimately how we transform them through communication (Eisenberg, 2007; Gergen, 1991). This perspective is particularly relevant to the study of family bereavement insofar as socially approved or taken-for-granted meanings surrounding death and loss powerfully shape expectations for how we are to feel and behave. This concept of socially approved ways of grieving appeared repeatedly in the interviews with the participants in this study as well as in my own experiences with grief. Family

members grieve in a myriad of different ways, but they often feel there is a õcorrectö way to grieve and often use this as a guideline as to whom in the family is grieving õcorrectly.ö In summary, õSocial construction theory focuses on how institutions, groups, and individuals take an active role in the formation of their perceived realityö (Hacking, 1999). People may hold beliefs and assumptions that seem logical and natural to them, but in reality are culturally produced. I develop this perspective in more detail when I discuss cultural approaches to grieving later in this chapter.

Social construction theory, according to Hoffman (1990), also holds that meanings are in flux in the sense that they emerge unendingly from the interactions between people. These evolving meanings are part of a general flow of constantly changing narratives. This aspect of social construction shows up in my project in the form of a tension felt by some families after loss between stability and change (Galvin et al., 2004). On one hand, families fall back on established stories and rituals; such things give order and stability to their lives after a catastrophic loss. However they may also creatively invent new rituals or alter their stories as a way of creating new definitions and meanings. This creativity can be an important way of coping.

Using qualitative methods, this study addresses the following research questions:

R (1): What is the role of family stories and rituals in making sense of the sudden loss of teenage and young adult children?

R (2): How does a survivorøs role as sibling or parent impact the grieving process?

Next I begin to develop a framework for this study by looking at how researchers have incorporated family perspectives into research on loss. In the remainder of this chapter, I provide an overview of the family systems literature and the different perspectives it offers on bereavement. I introduce the evolutionary model of bereavement and explain why its concepts are important in relation to this research. I then explain how grief can be viewed as a cultural performance. I conclude this chapter with a review of the existing literature on grief as a process of meaning-making, including studies of family ritual, and the role of shrines and charms in memorializing. I end with information on the narrative approaches related to storying loss.

Family Perspectives on Bereavement

Over the years, researchers from many disciplines have pioneered studies of the dying process (Aries, 1974; Kübler-Ross, 1969), the denial of death (Becker, 1973), the process of mourning (Bowlby, 1969; Pollock, 1961), and the nature of bereavement and grief (Lewis, 1961). More recently, researchers have begun to extend this earlier work on death and dying by examining the impact of a family memberøs death on the family system. As family therapists Froma Walsh and Monica McGoldrick have observed, õOf all life experiences, death poses the most painful adaptation challenges for the family as a system and for every surviving member, with reverberations for all other relationshipsö (Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991, xv).

To contextualize my study, I begin by reviewing research on loss from a family systems perspective (Hoffman, 1981; Yerby et al., 1990). Systems theory addresses the ways in which social systems manage tensions between stability and change; thus systems theory is particularly relevant to understanding bereavement as a disruption that affects relationships within the family.

Survivors have memorialized the dead in myriad ways throughout history (Gillis, 1996), but individuals within the family and the family as a unit have their own way(s) of remembering a deceased member. Family memorializing can take different material and symbolic forms, including interacting with artifacts and õshrines,ö (Gentry et. al, 1995), enacting formal ceremonies, and maintaining day-to-day ritualized observances (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004; Wolin & Bennett, 1984). Klass et al. (1996) note that survivors rely on memories, dreams about the deceased, conversations about them with others, as well as cherished objects in order to remember them. Due to the underrepresentation of the sibling voice in the existing literature, I will focus particularly on how young people find meaning after loss. The ways in which surviving siblings and parents choose to memorialize their lost loved ones can offer larger insight into the process of constructing coherence and finding meaning after unexpected loss.

Gelcher (1986) compares the experience of the death of a family member to õa minor tremor in a major earthquake. Its immediate effects will be felt by those who are close, but eventually, as a continuing complex of successive reactions, it shakes the whole system of relationships by interacting with processes already in gear. To understand the nature of the shock and its effect,

one must see it in the context of the full social network and across timeö (Gelcher, 1986, p. 316). To gain a better understanding of how families grieve it is beneficial to view the bereaved family as a system subject to õtremorsö and changes over a longitudinal time period.

Family systems theory is rooted in Gregory Batesonøs (1972) studies of families with a member suffering from schizophrenia. From his observations, Bateson hypothesized that families create communication and behavioral patterns sometimes referred to as õrulesö for the family. Systems theorists believed the family system to be committed to stability, or õcalibrationö (Galvin et al., 2006). Families calibrate by enforcing rules on communication, for example, rules about what subjects are or are not õdiscussable.ö These often implicit rules in turn become patterns that the family follows. Families establish communication rules for interactions within the nuclear family, and they also set boundaries for communication outside of the nuclear family.

Along with communication patterns and rules, several distinctive systems concepts are particularly relevant to the study of family loss. Two related ideas are õwholenessö and õinterdependenceö (Yerby et al., 1990). The family, like other kinds of social systems, represents a õwholeö made up of integrated parts. õDistinctive communication patterns between and among family members emerge as a result of this wholeness,ö thus shaping the identity of the family (Galvin et al., 2006, p. 313). Interdependence implies that a change in one part of the system resonates in the other parts. This means that family members are dependent on one another in order to function. This interdependence is especially apparent

when viewing the family as an emotional unit (Bowen, 1976; Hoffman, 1981). Family members are highly emotionally connected and react to one anotherøs needs, anxiety, and distress. The degree of interdependence varies, but families are often more emotionally connected than they might think.

Family therapists such as Murray Bowen and Lynn Hoffman have discussed the impact the loss of a member can have on the family system (Bowen, 1976; Hoffman, 1981). When a death happens, most family members react with anxiety. According to Bowen, raised anxiety levels can lead to one or more family members feeling alone, depressed, or out of control. Given that families face the highest moments of crises when they are renegotiating membership within the family (Hoffman, 1981), it is not surprising that losing a family member, having to let go, or bringing a new member into the family is especially hard on those that have trouble reorganizing.

Furthermore, Krell and Rabkin (1979) found that after the family system encounters the loss of one of its members, õAdaptations are made in order to secure a new family equilibrium attendant upon such a lossö (p. 471). After the death of a family member, new strategies are employed to try to maintain stability or õhomeostasis.ö Among the most common homeostatic adjustments after a death, according to Bowlby-West (1983), is e*nmeshment,* which occurs when family members fear the loss of another member, and therefore display overprotective behavior and tighten the family boundary. Another strategy for maintaining homeostasis is through *family secrets*. An example is the family grieving the loss of a member to suicide. Death by suicide tends to bring guilt

and shame to the surviving family members and they will often decide not to talk about the death or the deceased person. The silence enacts an understood family secret that is kept by all members and is usually passed down from generation to generation. Surviving family members just donøt talk about it.

According to Krell and Rabkin (1979), another common homeostatic response to death is *idealization* of the deceased child by the parents, creating challenges for the surviving sibling(s). The sibling(s) now feel they are in competition with the dead sibling for their parentsø attention and affection. *Infantilization* occurs when parents discourage autonomous behavior from the surviving siblings or the surviving sibling might assume the parental role to care for the grieving parents thus skipping crucial adolescent stages. Finally, when family members search for a *replacement* in an attempt to fill the absence created by the death, they are displaying another type of homeostatic response to death. An adoption, marriage, or pregnancies are examples of trying to replace the lost loved one in an effort to maintain homeostasis (Bowlby-West, 1983).

Early theorists identified homeostatic responses to death in the family, but family therapy has gradually shifted away from õthe biologic/cybernetic metaphor that compares a family to an organism or a machine. Terms like ÷homeostasis,ø ÷circularity,ø ÷autopoesis,ø as spatial metaphors that explain how entities remain the same are giving way to temporal analogies like õnarratives, histories, and flows, [that] assume that entities are always in the process of changeö (Hoffman, 1990, p. 3). In contrast to early cybernetic perspectives on the family, recent thinkers endorse an evolutionary model for family systems that recognizes the

unpredictability and spontaneous change that families often face (Hoffman, 1990; Yerby, 1995). This new way of thinking is especially important for family therapists using a systems approach to therapy. Cybernetic models, according to Hoffman (1990) emphasize the therapistøs control. From this point of view, it is the therapistøs job to identify the problem in the system in order to bring the family back to homeostasis. This practice, Hoffman argues, limits the family õnarrativeö or its capacity for change. Hoffman hopes more therapists will discontinue using the õmachineö as a metaphor for families in order to find better ways of working with them, arguing that õIn therapy we listen to a story and then we collaborate with the persons we are seeing to invent other stories or other meanings for the stories that are toldö (Hoffman, 1990, p. 11). Hoffmanøs perspective on the õnarrative turnö in family therapy is consistent with newer meaning-centered models for understanding bereavement. I will return to this topic in a later section.

Within the last three decades family therapists have focused more specifically on loss and how it affects the family system (see Hoffman, 1981). Bowen (1991) asks therapists to promote open family communication. The more open they are with one another about their grief experiences, the greater their chances are of adaptation. In newer research, theorists have continued the discussion on bereavement and its affect on the family system. For example, through survey research, Jordan et al. (1993) introduced a typology of family responses to the death of a member. Rolland (1990) examined õanticipatory lossö from a family systems perspective and in turn generated a family systems-illness

model that combines psychosocial types and phases of illness with family variables in order to expand the way therapists work with families facing anticipatory loss. Gilbert (1996) and Traylor et al. (2003) contributed to the literature by identifying differences in grief among family members of the same system. They found that often members of a family have mismatched grief, which can lead to more stress on the system. For example, a mother may be experiencing quite a bit of sadness and she does not understand why her husband does not display any outward signs of sadness. This õmismatchedö grief can cause discord among the surviving family members. õYet in order to maintain the family as a functioning entity, family members must recognize the loss, reorganize after the loss, and reinvest in the familyö (p. 575). Nadeau (1998) further explains the identity transformation a family faces after a death:

When somebody important to us dies, we lose definitions of self and situations that came out of interaction with that personí When family relationships are severed by the death of a family member the contribution that the deceased made to the identities of other family members by interacting with them is lost. The process of redefinition of self occurs for each memberí adding or subtracting even a single member of a family has dramatic implications for the structure of the family. The meanings that families attach to the death may both influence, and be influenced by, structural changes in the family. Not only are there new meanings to be made related to the death, but there are also fewer members to make them (p. 10-11).

As Nadeau explains, surviving family members struggle with reconfiguring an identity now that the loved one has died.

Some family members may feel they have not only lost the deceased member, but also other living family members. This is a type of secondary loss. Secondary losses almost always emerge over time as the death is processed. Rosenblatt (1996) points out that all that is lost is not concentrated at the time of loss, however õthere is, instead a sequence, perhaps extending over oneøs lifetime, of new losses or new realizations of lossö (p. 50).

Many theorists emphasize the idea that conflict and discord among members are common changes in the family after the loss of a loved one (Hoffman, 1981). They also agree that family members have to take on two different tasks after a death in the immediate family. First, they must grieve for the relationship they had with the deceased, and second, they grieve for the change in the family. Hoffman (1981) notes that families face the highest moments of crises when they are renegotiating membership within the family. Losing a family member, having to let go, or bringing a new member into the family is especially hard on families. Having examined literature on family responses to bereavement, I turn to a consideration of literature on the nature and experience of grief.

Perspectives on Grief

Grief as an Evolving Process

In contrast to the well-known bereavement model set forth by Kubler-Ross (1969), some researchers have begun to reconceptualize grieving as an

evolutionary process (Silverman & Klass, 1996). Kubler-Ross identified five stages a person travels through in the grieving process: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Although her work was instrumental in helping to pave the way for meaningful discussions about grief, her stages have often been quoted as the rule for õhealthyö grieving. The evolutionary model disputes the claim that grief is scripted and follows five stages in chronological order with a beginning and an end. Rather, the evolutionary model describes grief as a process that õdoes not end, but in different ways bereavement affects the mourner for the rest of his or her life. People are changed by the experience; they do not get over it, and part of the change is a transformed but continuing relationship with the deceasedö (Silverman & Klass, 1996, p. 19).

The term, õaccommodationö might be more applicable in describing a familyøs experience with grief as opposed to a õrecoveryö or õresolution.ö Silverman and Klass (1996) stress that grief is not continuous, but rather is felt as õpangsö or in õwavesö over the lifetime. õMost times with a death or other major loss, all that is lost is not concentrated at the time of loss. There is, instead, a sequence, perhaps extending over oneøs lifetime, of new losses or new realizations of lossö (Rosenblatt, 1996, p. 50). This concept is especially important for health care professionals working with bereaved family members. Toller (2005) explains,

> í professionals may not recognize or validate the contradiction of presenceóabsence experienced by parents. Instead, counselors and therapists may believe encouraging parents to move on or to let go is more

> appropriate. Because of their professional training, it may be difficult to convince therapists, clergy, counselors, and other healthcare professionals that some parents desire to somehow hold on to their relationship with their deceased child and this desire to hold on is not necessarily a sign of denial or unhealthy grieving. Fortunately, bereavement research indicates that grief professionals are beginning to reject the notion that severing all attachments with deceased loved ones is the desired way to facilitate healthy grieving. (p. 63)

These scholars accept the evolutionary model of grief that views grieving along a continuum lasting throughout a personøs lifespan.

While reviewing grief as an evolutionary process, the concept of õcomplicated griefö arises. By definition, the symptoms of complicated grief include õthe current experience (more than a year after a loss) of intense intrusive thoughts, pangs of severe emotion, distressing yearnings, feeling excessively alone and empty, excessively avoiding tasks reminiscent of the deceased, unusual sleep disturbances, and maladaptive levels of loss of interest in personal activitiesö (Horowitz et al., 2003, p. 290). There is general agreement among clinicians and researchers that psychological complications can result from bereavement (Prigerson & Jacobs, 2001), but a controversy lies in the types of complications that have been identified as fitting into the category of complicated grief, and whether or not it should be included in the diagnostic system of mental disorders (DSM), (Stroebe & Schut, 2005). Other concerns researchers have related to complicated grief are the misuse of the term complicated grief, how to

make the distinction between õnormalö and õcomplicatedö grief, stigmatization of a person who is diagnosed with complicated grief, and health insurance funding issues for the potential DSM classification of complicated grief. Stroebe and Shut (2005) suggest that including complicated grief in the DSM simply because Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been adapted is erroneous because although bereavement can occur after a traumatic event, it is considered to be a normal human experience to the loss of a relationship, where PTSD is a reaction to a trauma that is generally considered beyond the range of a normal human experience.

When a clinician or researcher considers grief in terms of an evolutionary model, he or she may recognize that õRespondents may not have complicated grief, and it may be as important to accept that ÷normalø grief includes severe suffering, which, unless there is complication, cannot be accelerated or alleviatedö (Stroebe & Schut, 2005, p. 67).

Keeping this evolutionary model of grief in mind, I will next explain the different perspectives on sibling grief and parental grief.

Sibling Grief and Parental Grief

To lose a child has been said to be the worst loss a person can face in his or her lifetime (Rando, 1986). Therefore, it is no surprise that parental grief has received a large amount of attention from researchers (Riches & Dawson, 2000; Schwab, 1992; Todd, 2007) as well as self-help books (Barkin & Mitchell; 2005; Finkbeiner, 1996; Redfern & Gilbert, 2008; Sanders, 1992). Unlike parents who have lost a child, surviving siblings fit into the category of the forgotten griever

along with best friends, ex-husbands and wives (Doka, 1989). Doka coined the term õdisenfranchised grief,ö relating it to those persons who do not always receive adequate social support after the death of a loved one. Siblingsø roles as grievers are not always acknowledged usually making the grieving process even harder and creating an enormous need for more research on the topic. From the five families who participated in my research, I include the extended narratives of several siblings as well as parents; while parents are important, it is crucial that siblingsø voices are also heard because they are often the õforgotten grievers.ö I further explain the grief characteristics unique to the sibling experience.

A plethora of studies focus on losing a sibling in the adolescent years (Crehan, 2004; Davies, 1988; Forward & Garlie, 2003; Hogan & De Santis, 1992; & Romond, 1989). These authors address childrenøs behavior after the loss, and what a parent or therapist should expect from a child. For example, they focus on a childøs need to be included in the funeral process, and the important role parentsø play in promoting healthy bereavement for the child. Horsley and Patterson (2006) and Lamers (1995) continue this argument and speak directly to parents in their articles. They stress the importance of parent education about child bereavement after a sibling dies. But sibling loss affects all age groups, not just children.

Surviving siblings experience õdisenfranchised griefö in part because the strength of the sibling bond is discredited and frequently goes unacknowledged. According to Dower and Lister (2001) the surviving sibling often exists as the closest person to the deceased sibling before his or her death, thus making the

grief experience enormously painful. Markowitz (1994) notes, õIt is possible that in siblinghood we experience more intensity of emotion than in any other relationship that follows. Our worlds are shoulder to shoulder, and our vulnerabilities are laid bareö (p. 92). Siblings share secrets with one another that often exclude their parents. This intimacy can make the sibling bond more intense than any other relationship, especially during the adolescent years and into adulthood (Markowitz, 1994). Siblings shape each othersø entire past and sometimes know almost everything about each other, good or bad. If close in age, surviving siblings find it difficult to remember a time when the deceased sibling was not a part of their lives. They find it incomprehensible to imagine a life without the deceased sibling. Markowitz (1994) observes, õFor the sibling bond is powerful, providing us with connection, validation, and belonging like no otherö (p. 52). The concept here is that the stronger the bond, the greater the sense of loss.

A common phenomenon found in surviving siblings is the õphantom siblingö (Bank and Kahn, 1982). This happens when the living sibling searches for the deceased brother or sister in other people. They hope to reproduce their lost loved by replacing them with someone else. They look for the deceased sibling's smile; gestures, posture, or laugh in someone else. When they find someone, that person becomes a substitute for the deceased sibling (p. 283). According to Andrews and Auz (2002), in some instances, the surviving sibling might try to imitate and copy the behavior of the deceased sibling. Doing so helps the survivor feel closer to the dead brother or sister. For example, if the deceased

siblingøs passion was football, the surviving sibling might devote the rest of his high school career to football, in honor of his brother, when football is really not the surviving siblingøs passion.

Another common occurrence for surviving siblings is a lack of compassion from others for their loss. Dower and Lister (2001) notes that when a child dies, most people direct sympathy towards the parents. Surviving siblings often hear repetitious condolences such as, õYou have to be strong for your parents. They are really going to need you now.ö This leads many surviving siblings to feel the need to be strong for their parents and to try to ease or minimize their pain in some way. Siblings suppress their own emotions in an effort to not upset their parents, but this can have an adverse effect interrupting the surviving siblingøs grief (Horsley & Patterson, 2006, p. 132). Furthermore, surviving siblings are also susceptible to õprohibited mourning,ö a concept introduced by Robinson and Mahon (1997) that explains the protective posture siblings often take towards their parents after the death of a brother or sister. Siblings will often minimize the display of their emotions after the death in an order to protect their parents. They believe they will contribute to the surviving parentsø grief if they display their own. õThe expression of grief by the surviving siblings is often minimized or overshadowed by the grief of the bereaved parents. Thus, whether externally imposed or self-imposed, a protective posture is chosenö (p. 482). Prohibited mourning is a concept specific to surviving siblings and is usually not experienced among surviving parents. On the other hand, a

commonality experienced by all survivors is the comprehension of mortality and the fear of oneøs own death.

This is especially prevalent among surviving siblings in part because siblings identify with one another. Often siblings cannot remember a time when they were not present in each othersø lives. They know each other's likes and dislikes, hopes and dreams, and strengths and weaknesses. They share the same traits, like hair color, gestures, and the same laugh. Markowitz (1994) explains,

> Siblings are the living remnant of our past, a buffer against the loss of our own history, the deepest, oldest memories of us. Our siblings hold up a mirror before us, forcing us to look at an image of ourselves.ö We see a part of who we are in our siblings. "That's why the death of a loved one can stir up fears of our own mortality (Lightner & Hathaway, 1990, p. 164).

On the other hand, parental grief has some interesting characteristics as well. Parental grief is perceived by society to be the most intense and invokes the most pain out of all the different types of grief (Rando, 1986; Rees, 1997). The death of a child is viewed as an unnatural order of things. Parents are always supposed to precede their children in death (Davies, 1993). The age that a child dies does not seem to have a large impact on the intensity of grief for parents. They can experience extreme grief after a miscarriage or the death of a premature baby as well as an older or adult child (Broen et al., 2004; Buchi et al., 2007).

One common feeling that accompanies parental grief is guilt over the childøs death (Miles & Demi, 1983; Videka-Sherman & Lieberman, 1985). Miles

and Demi (1983) conducted a study where 34% of their respondents who were grieving parents reported that guilt was the most difficult element of their grief. Parents often feel that they failed their children as their protector (Rando, 1986).

As one might expect, marriage difficulties are sometimes encountered while parents are grieving (Gilbert, 1989). In one case study, Klass (1996) found that a mother was extremely upset with her husbandøs ability to õshut offö his grief while he was at work. She interpreted his behavior as a lack of love for their son. This caused a major rift between the two of them. Each partner grieves in a unique way and may not always be able to provide the emotional support needed for one another (Bohannon, 1990). This can be damaging to the health of the relationship. Marital discord and divorce tend to rise after the death of a child, but in most cases couples remain together and some feel closer than they ever felt before the death (Dijkstra & Stroebe, 1998; Najman et al., 1993).

Klass (1996) reported that parents often put great importance on how their social world reacted to the death. Parents are interested in things such as funeral attendance, if the childøs school planned a memorial in his or her honor, and if other people have been profoundly affected by the childøs death. As parents look to others in their social world for support and comfort they are often disappointed and feel as though their lives have completely stopped while everyone else has moved on. For this reason, surviving parents tend to benefit from support groups, such as Compassionate Friends, to be surrounded by people who understand their pain.

Together, these researchers have created dialogue about the importance of addressing the effect of loss on a family. In the following section I examine emerging perspectives on grief as a cultural performance.

Grief as a Cultural Performance

There are multiple schools of thought concerning the social and cultural nature of grief, including õmodernist,ö õromanticist,ö and õpostmodernö perspectives (Stroebe et al., 1996). The modernist approach, which arose in the twentieth century, õsuggests that people need to recover from their state of intense emotionality and return to normal functioning and effectiveness as quickly and efficiently as possible. From this perspective, grieving, a debilitating emotional response, is seen by many psychologists and counselors as a troublesome interference with daily routines, and should be worked throughö (Stroebe et al., 1996, p. 32). This process is usually described as õgrief work,ö a number of tasks that must be systematically completed in order to achieve adaptation (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1991; M. Stroebe, 1994). One of the most important steps in the grief work hypothesis is breaking ties with the deceased also known as the õbreaking bonds hypothesis.ö

Romanticist views of grief date back one approximately a century. In contrast to the modernist perspective, õthe concept of grief was far different for romanticists because close relationships were matters of bonding in depth, the death of an intimate other constituted a critical point of lifeøs definition. To grieve was to signal the significance of the relationship, and the depth of oneøs own spirit. Valor was found in sustaining these bonds, despite a broken heartö

(Stroebe et. al, 1996, p. 37). Romanticists refused to dissolve bonds with the deceased because they did not want the relationship to be viewed as superficial. This way of viewing death and grief was expressed by some of the most famous poets of the 19th century such as William Barnes and Emily Dickinson who wrote often about being broken hearted by a loved oneøs death (Stroebe et al, 1996).

The postmodern perspective encourages a blurring of the rigid lines set forth by both modernist and romanticist perspectives. The postmodernist õmight profitably be concerned with the enormous variations in forms of bereavement. Rather than attempting to generalize, they would search for an appreciative understanding of grief in all its varietiesö (Stroebe et. al, 1996, p. 42). It might prove desirable on the therapeutic level to teach people that there are many goals that can be set, many ways to feel, and no set series of stages that they must pass throughô that many forms of expression and behavioral patterns are acceptable reaction to loss. õThe key concepts are growth, flexibility, and appropriateness within a cultural context. Awareness of a need for such multiplicity is just beginning to penetrate the field of bereavement researchö (Stroebe et. al, 1996, p. 42). Families would benefit from understanding the impact culture has on acceptable grief practices and utilize that understanding to create openness in accepting different family membersø reactions to death and grieving practices. Grief is messy, convoluted, and extremely personal, yet when it comes to other family members we all seem to have an opinion on who is grieving correctly. I know I would have benefited from understanding that grief is complex and shaped

by social and culture expectations when I judged my other family members during their bereavement.

The loss of a loved one is undoubtedly painful for all the survivors: parents and siblings. I hope to shed light on both types of grieving through my study. After the loss of a loved one, surviving family members can be seen as searching for meaning in the midst of pain. Increasingly scholars are focusing on grief as a process of meaning-making in the midst of disruption. In the following section, I examine key themes in this literature.

Grief as a Process of Meaning-Making

õThe perceived coherence of oneøs life may at any moment dissolve into chaos when one confronts an unexpected catastropheí Suddenly, a family must reappraise where they have been and where they are going as a family, who they are to one another and how they will manageö (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004, p. 515). This quote describes the chaos that surrounds a family after a tragedy and hints at the inevitable quest that each family member endures to try to make sense of it all. In addition, a personøs search for significance in a death is key to his or her adaptation to the loss. This process of finding meaning or sensemaking is defined as the effort by a person to fit a traumatic event into his or her conception of how the world should work. Most people in western cultures believe that õthe momentous events in their lives are controllable, comprehensible, and nonrandomí here the emphasis is on perceiving oneøs social environment as predictable, ordered and benign (if not benevolent)ö (Davis et al., 1998, p. 563). But when a tragedy occurs, survivors are left with the difficult task of finding

meaning and often do so through the process of making sense or finding some benefit from the tragedy. Davis et al., (1998) has termed this õbenefit-findingö in the face of loss. She notes that people who seek out the silver lining in a loss and who are able to identify how their lives have changed for the better usually have an easier time adapting after the loss. Benefits after a death typically fall into three categories: growth in character, gain in perspective, and strengthening of personal relationships (Davis et al., 1998). For example, some survivors find meaning in becoming emotionally stronger, or by having more compassion for others. Others find meaning with the overwhelming sense of õhuman finitude,ö or by strengthening or finding their faith (Davis et al., 1998). After a death, every survivor searches for meaning, but according to several authors, it is those who can actually find something positive who have truly adapted (see for example, Davis et al., 1998). As Janoff-Bulman and Frantz (1997) argue, õSuccessful adaptation involves first trying to make sense of the event, and then finding some benefit or value in the experience for oneøs lifeö (p. 91)

In recent years, language-oriented or õsensemakingö approaches to the family have begun to play an influential role in both research and practice. These perspectives offer a way of thinking about family change, including family responses to loss, which emphasizes concepts such as Byng-Halløs (1991) notion of rewriting the family script (or family story) after a loss. If families can rewrite the script positively, it tends to aid in the grieving process and thus affects how they grieve in the future. The language-oriented work of Byng-Hall (1991), Hoffman (1990) and others suggests that family reality is constructed in

communication and therefore, can be reconstructed to open possibilities for change and adjustment to loss. Reframing the story of loss then, becomes invaluable in the survivorøs adaptation to the loss (Davis et al., 1998).

Riches and Dawson (2000) examined how surviving parents give meaning to their loss. õSharing memories and exploring the significance of their childrenøs lives with others provided them with internal pictures of their children with which they could continue to relateö (as cited in Davies, 1993 p. 510) which in turn aids in their sensemaking process. Davis et al. (1998) strengthen the argument that sensemaking is crucial after loss saying, õresearch on parental bereavement indicates that the search for significance is central to the process of readjustment after a childøs death and that parents who are able to find meaning through becoming stronger or more compassionate people, accepting human finitude, or deepening their spirituality cope better with the lossö (p. 246).

Ritual

One way that family members search for meaning after a loss is through rituals. Neimeyer et al. (2002) note that rituals õserve both integrative and regulatory goals by providing structure for the emotional chaos of grief, conferring a symbolic order on events, and facilitating the construction of shared meanings among members of the family, community, or even nationö (p. 237). Thus, rituals as well as stories have the power to help families work through the grieving process (Fiese, 2006; Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004). Due to lifeøs circumstances a familyøs world can turn upside down at any moment. Examining the ritual process after the death of a loved one is vital to understanding how

families memorialize, construct meaning, and move forward in the face of tragedy. A death in the family, diagnosis of a terminal illness, or even job relocation can have a profound effect on a family, calling for a re-evaluation of rituals. The re-evaluation of rituals and the creation of new rituals offer families new methods to aid in the grieving process; a productive way to memorialize and promote healing.

Culture and ritual are terms that go hand in hand in the ritual literature. For example, Romanoff and Ternzio (1998), define rituals as õcultural devices that facilitate the preservation of social order and provide ways to comprehend the complex and contradictory aspects of human existence within a given societal context. The distinguishing characteristics of rituals, and their power, are contained in the use of symbols within a performance frameworkö (Romanoff & Ternzio, 1998, p. 698).

Rituals now serve as resources that families actively utilize to create a shared meaning within the family. õTogether, stories and rituals serve the practical function of organizing and structuring the indefinite flow of family experiences into meaningful coherence; they are vehicles for fashioning a world that is plausible and intelligible, the means by which we ÷do familyøö (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004, p. 518). Increasingly rituals are being reinvented in families to õresist the canonical, creating stories and rituals that counter oppressive narratives and open new possibilities for meaningful family experienceö (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004, p. 519). For example, families could benefit from inventing new rituals on the anniversary of a loved oneøs death such as choosing a symbolic

object and sharing the significance of it with the other family members, releasing balloons on the death anniversary, or simply just coming together over the dinner table to share memories of the lost loved one; the ritual ideas are limitless (Imber-Black, 1991). This proves to be especially helpful in those families suffering from ambiguous loss, for example, suicide, stigmatized deaths such as AIDS, or a disappearance or missing in action. Ronald Grimes (1995; 2000), one of the leading pioneers in the concepts of ritual innovation, found that new and innovative rituals can inspire change and renewal in families facing predictable and unpredictable crises. He notes that many people create rituals to õpatch the holes in the fabric of their ripped collective livesö (p. 120). Grimes (1995) believes we should be as innovative with the final passage (death) as we are with weddings and births, but we are not, because õBefore death we are too busy. During it, too stricken. After it, still recoveringö (p. 152). Ramanoff and Ternzio (1998) capture this concept, saying õThe mourner who plants a seedling in memory of the deceased acknowledges the loss, and waters and nourishes the sapling. Later, he or she sits in the shade of the treeö (p. 709). Such new forms of commemorating can serve a tremendous purpose in life after loss.

Rituals are important because they offer families a method to create stabilizing patterns of behavior and bring generations together socially. They also promote family communication that in turn can encourage family relationships, produce family roles and ranks, encourage the functionality of the household, and imbue family pride and satisfaction (Bossard and Boll, 1950).

Rituals can serve as an expression of emotions, and because they are repetitive they soothe feelings of anxiety, providing stability and predictability in the face of chaos. Thus, enacting rituals becomes increasingly important after a death in the family. Bolton and Camp (1987) explain that there has been a decrease in the frequency of and importance placed on bereavement rituals. This has led to more cases of complicated grief. The correlation between ritual and complicated grief shows the importance of taking a closer look at ritual in relation to bereavement.

Among the rituals often practiced by bereaved family members are those characterized as õtransformational rituals.ö These rituals, which are distinct from funeral observances, are said to aid the survivor in accepting the transfer from a life on earth to memories of the deceased that are now carried by the survivor. õSelecting a treasured memento, sharing an ethical legacy, and bringing closure and completion to family rifts all serve a transformative function. The bereaved is changed by his or her participation in these simple symbolic acts, and the deceased is transformed to an inner representation based on memory, meaning, and emotional connectionö (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998, p. 700). Shuchter and Zisook (1988) help to define this õprocess wherein possessions, creations, or shared experiences of the deceased are imbued with the spirit or memories of the dead, a process that evolves before the death but develops a higher valence only after the deathö (p. 273). The accounts of many of the participants in my research show the importance of ritual after a death.

The fact that ritual aids in the continuation of a relationship with the deceased is especially important now that postmodern perspectives emphasize the maintenance of bonds with the lost loved one (Vickio 1999). Attig (1996) agrees, õThose of us who desire it can find a dynamic, life-affirming, life-promoting, enriching, and most often, loving connection with those who have diedö (p. 187). Worden (1991) encouraged his patients to relocate, not relinquish, their relationships with their lost loved ones. It is healthy for survivors to want to pursue an ongoing connection with the deceased. Transformative rituals afford them this opportunity.

While rituals can be comforting, they are often of great concern to people grieving a loss. Survivors wonder how to make it through previously shared rituals without the lost loved one, such as Christmas, Thanksgiving, birthdays, graduations, and weddings. It is not uncommon for families to desert all previously held rituals immediately following a loss. Because a family finds the absence of the deceased member to be overwhelming (Roberts, 2003), they place a suspension on celebrations, which often causes a repetitive state of unhappiness and grief (Imber-Black, 1991). What happens to a family when death and loss are not openly expressed and ritualized? What happens when tragedy and loss are hidden, ignored, or pushed under the table? Roberts (2003) relays the concerns of one of her clients,

> My family did not mourn its losses, did not create rituals around these terrible and terribly important transitions. Without the mourning of deaths, can there be a real celebration of births? With the denial of the

> meaning of major transitions, can a family with meaning mark other transitions, or do these rituals of transitions then need to be carefully contained so that they do not lead too dangerously close to thoughts and feelings of other times of change, to those who are not here, and to feelings that have not been allowed? (p. 388)

Robertsø client asks noteworthy questions about ignoring rituals during times of major transition. Therapists encourage families to embrace family rituals after a loss as opposed to avoiding them out of fear. In the moment of pain, a family ritual can contribute to a familyøs road to finding meaning. Imber-Black (1991) encouraged one family who experienced trouble moving on after the death to share stories of the lost loved one. During a therapy session, he encouraged them to share special memories from past Thanksgivings. õRemembering the holiday rituals together opened a door to shared grieving and began to alleviate this familyøs fears of being together for this yearøs holidayö (p. 210). McGoldrick (1991) offers therapists ritualistic symbolic activities created to help families get through the mourning period like releasing balloons on the death anniversary or writing letters to the deceased family member.

Family therapy research has gone on to place families into different categories according to their ritual practice. *Interrupted ritual* families have trouble participating in ritual because of trauma. *Underritualized* families do not celebrate social rituals at all or use them as rites of passage. On the other hand, r*igidly ritualized* families always perform rituals in the same way, refusing to alter them after the death or create new ones (Imber-Black, 1991).

Rigidly ritualized families refuse to acknowledge the loss, and strictly follow all former rituals while refusing to even speak the loved oneøs name. An example of a rigidly ritualized family is portrayed in Guestøs (1976) *Ordinary People*. In the book, the Jarrett family found themselves trapped in a web of rules controlled by Beth, Conrad and Buckøs mother. Buck passed away in a boating accident and Beth set the rules for acceptable family grieving and rituals. For example, it is difficult for Conrad and his father, Calvin, to find õsafeö topics for discussion when eating around the table. Beth deemed anything deeper than surface conversation as inappropriate. Beth rigidly follows family rituals without acknowledging the absence of one very important member. Her actions hinder the healing process for herself and the rest of her family. During an especially icy Christmas dinner experience, Conrad attempts to break the silence and openly shares the pain he feels inside due to Buckøs absence. Beth coldly ignores his blatant cry for help, and changes the subject. Although the characters in *Ordinary People* are fictional, the situation is all too common.

Another common type of ritualized practice employs the sanctification of the deceasedøs possessions. This practice results from family membersøefforts to try to keep the deceased memberøs memory present in the face of her or his unquestionable absence (Belk, 1991). A survivorøs relationship with a deceased loved one clearly puts the deceasedøs possessions in sacred status (Gentry et al., 1995). Survivorsøwill often group these sacred objects together, which then becomes a kind of shrine.ö Shrines serve as õan external representation of an interior mysteryô the spiritual core of who we really are. It is a way of showing

in tangible form what is happening in our heartsö (Lifepath, 2008, p. 1). Shrines often include photographs, tokens of achievements, and objects. This place can serve as an axis for prayer, reflection, remembrance, meditation, or some other spiritual practice.

Shrines are an example of using these transitional objects in the grieving process. Grimes (1995; 2000) explains his use of a shrine after the loss of his son, Trevor. Because he was excluded from the traditional funeral rituals by his ex-wife and her husband, he decided to be creative in memorializing Trevor. He created a buried mound in his backyard filled with some of Trevorøs favorite possessions and noted that this process proved cathartic for him. In contrast, in the book *Ordinary People* the deceased sonøs (Buck) room is left untouched. In an effort to keep Buck õpresentö Beth refuses to touch or change anything about his room and turns it into a shrine. The surviving sibling and father are extremely disturbed by this shrine and it provides even more room for conflict within the family. Whether or not they promote health grieving behavior, shrines are very much a part of the ritual process after a death.

Clearly, rituals serve a crucial role in the family and individualøs struggle to find meaning in the wake of death. I will now turn to narrative, another form of meaning-making after loss.

Narrative

In recent years, narrative approaches have begun to play an influential role in research on bereavement. These perspectives appear under different labels but the assumption underlying much of this work is that people make sense of the

events in their lives through the narratives they construct. Some family communication scholars have referred to narrative approaches as õfamily storiesö (Yerby et. al, 1990). Family therapists refer to their therapeutic approach as a constructionist or language-based approach (Friedman, 1993). According to linguistic anthropologists, Eleanor Ochs and Lisa Capps, õNarrators often are bewildered, surprised, or distressed by some unexpected events and begin recounting so that they may draw conversational partners into discerning the significance of their experiencesö (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 2). Retelling an experience to another person and having a conversation about the event helps the teller make sense of the event. õNarrative activity becomes a tool for collaboratively reflecting upon specific situations and their place in the general scheme of lifeö (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 2). Narratives do not just recount the facts surrounding an event; rather they enable the teller to reinterpret past events (Bochner, 2001; Bruner, 1991; Crites, 1986). When a person reflects on events from the past, he or she brings current perspectives, which enables a reconstruction, reevaluation, and re-story of the event (Bochner, 2001). Thus, narratives become crucial during those major turning points in peopleøs lives, for example, the loss of a loved one (Bochner, 1997; Frank, 1995; McAdams & Bowman, 2001). For example, in my story of my relationship with Daniel, I recognize õthat fateful conversation with my parents took its toll on our relationshipö and I reveal my perception of a connection between the event of my brotherøs death and the event of my parents expressing their disapproval of our relationship. This narrative demonstrates my sense-making in action.

The idea that survivors structure their narratives became apparent during the interviews with the participants in this study. It became evident that the storyteller is in control of the structure of the narrative, selecting which events to include and how to include them. As stories are told and retold, they are õnecessarily subject to revision and change as the speaker drops some old meanings and adds new meanings to portions of the life storyö (Linde, 1993, p. 4). For example, there are differences between mine and Apriløs story in her greater emphasis on our fatherøs experience. This is a good illustration of the idea that the same event can be remembered in multiple ways, hence suggesting that there is no objective truth or one version of õwhat actually happened.ö If April were to tell the entire story from her point of view, she would emphasize different connections and causalities (Linde, 1993).

Many of the participants in this study told their narratives with seemingly logical progression. Stories that help shape meaning have a sequence as opposed to random facts or incidents (Linde, 1993). In contrast, the story I told several years ago about the death of my brother, Jeremy never seemed logical or made sense linearly. It was a swirl of random chaotic details sometimes too painful to even attempt to place in a linear story. Frank (1995) acknowledges that not all narratives are õtidyö and do not always end well. Interruptions in oneøs life can make narratives seem both õconfusingö and õinconsistent.ö Frank considers these narratives the õuncomfortableö stories. Because they are uncomfortable, they have to be told. If the uncomfortable narrative goes untold, then the voice does not exist. I canøt say that my narrative is as õtidyö or as positive as some of the

narratives given by the participants in this research that will be shared in the following chapters, although I secretly wish it could be. õAll narrative exhibits tension between the desire to construct an over-arching storyline that ties events together in a seamless explanatory framework and the desire to capture the complexities of the events experienced, including the haphazard details, uncertainties, and conflicting sensibilities among protagonistsö (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 4). Tying events together seamlessly might seem to lessen the storyøs authenticity by õtying it all up with a pretty bow.ö Yet, including all of the chaotic details often leaves the listener with an unsettling feeling as if he or she had been thrown into a whirlwind of seemingly unconnected events.

Whether a narrative is as tidy as I would like is not of upmost importance. What is important is that the narratives are told in an effort to find or generate meaning out of an experience. This dissertation became an attempt not only to share my own narratives of loss in an effort to try to find some meaning, but to demonstrate more generally survivorsøquests for meaning through narrative. With social construction theory as a framework, I investigate the role of stories and rituals in the creation of social realities by surviving family members.

The remainder of this dissertation is organized into six chapters. In Chapter Two, I describe the families who participated in the study and the process through which they were recruited. I also discuss the procedures used to collect data, including in-depth interviews and participant observation. I then explain the analytic procedures used to interpret my field notes and interview transcripts. Chapters Three through Five provide the results of the analysis. In Chapter Three,

I present the analysis of my interviews and observations with particular attention to the kinds and meanings of rituals practiced within bereaved families. In Chapter Four, I present and analyze the stories from three different surviving siblings about their experiences of losing a brother or sister. I look at the way in which the stories are organized for what they reveal about how participants make sense of their experiences. In Chapter Five, I introduce two surviving parents from differing families. I show the experience of loss from the vantage point of a mother and a father as each struggle to find meaning in the loss of a child. Finally, Chapter Six, Discussion and Conclusions, presents some reflections on the findings of the study. I examine the implications of this research and its contributions to the literature on sensemaking and grief as well as the limitations and possible directions for future studies.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Much of the research on grief has employed quantitative research methods (see for example, Applebaum & Burns, 1991; Balk, 1983; Davies, 1988; Hurd, 1999; & Hogan et al., 1994). While these studies are informative, they do not always capture the lived experience of the survivor. I approached this research using qualitative interpretive methods to õseek out those narratives and stories people tell one another as they attempt to make sense of the epiphanies or existential turning-point moments in their livesö (Denzin, 1997, p. 92). I combined multiple in-depth interviews with family members with episodes of participant-observation in an effort to evoke detail-rich descriptions of their lives (Denzin, 1989). Interviews were especially important for gaining access, not only to the feelings and thoughts of participants, but also to the meanings that events hold for them. According to Lindlof (1995), interviewing provides insights into participantsø õcultural logics,ö that is, their taken-for-granted assumptions and justifications through which they make sense of traumatic events.

In using an interpretive approach I tried to remain keenly aware of the role I play as a survivor myself. I am not an objective observer of a culture of survivors, but rather a participant in research that explores survivorsø sensemaking processes after the death of a loved one. õThe qualitative researcher is situated in any given study and should be aware of the fact that he/she is part of

the scene being observed, and as such has an influence on itö (Watt, 2007, p. 90). I commit to looking back reflexively at how my own presence affected the findings, and question whether my account of a participantøs experience was correct, õor whether there might be yet another, equally useful way to study, characterize, display, read, or otherwise understand that accumulated field materialsö (VanMaanen, 1989, p. 51).

In this chapter, I explain the methods I used to obtain, share, and interpret the narratives outlined in this dissertation. I give a description of how I gained access to families, identifying primary contacts and resources, as well as describing the families who participated in the project. I also explain how the data were gathered and analyzed, including the choices I made when authoring my personal narratives and the narratives of my participants.

Participants

When Greenspan (1998) spoke to eight holocaust survivors, he asked them to tell him their tragic stories. He noticed in some cases when a survivor began to tell his or her story, he or she experienced a slide back towards the ÷deepnessø or the overwhelming emotions related to being in the experience (p. 149). The process of recalling the events transported them to a dark place emotionally. Of course, this was a concern to me as the researcher, but often potential participants are well aware of the overwhelming emotions that can arise out of sharing their stories. This knowledge can deter a person from participating in a study like mine, and I believe this was the impetus for much of the difficulty I had in finding participants.

I interviewed members of five families totaling fifteen people. I will refer to participants as members of the Jones, Stanton, Warner, Green, and Little families. The participants ranged in age from their early twenties to late fifties at the time of the interviews in 2009. The participants are all members of families in which a child died unexpectedly in adolescence or young adulthood.

Finding participants was challenging. I include information about the recruitment process because it revealed to me some of the subtle dimensions of loss as experienced by the participants. I began my search for participants by drafting a letter to give to the facilitator of the local chapter of *Compassionate Friends*, a nationally recognized support group for bereaved parents. I know the chapter facilitator personally and he agreed to read my letter at the next monthly meeting. I received two phone calls from different persons interested in participating after they heard about my study in the meeting. I believe they both contacted me because they know my parents who used to attend the Compassionate Friends meetings on a regular basis. After speaking with the first woman over the phone, she decided she could not participate because the subject matter might be too difficult to talk about. This was my first rejection and I was somewhat surprised because I assumed because she contacted me after hearing my letter that she would naturally be prepared to talk about her loss. The second woman who contacted me, Barbara, decided she and her husband, Lonnie, would be willing to participate.

After receiving only two responses from my letter to Compassionate Friends I realized I was going to have to use some of the relationships I had

already formed with survivors and send them letters to see if they would be willing to participate. I knew Mark from attending a sibling support group that he facilitated after I lost Jeremy. He is a vocal advocate for surviving siblings, and I knew he would be more than willing to participate. After receiving my letter he called me to learn more about the study. After speaking with him, he contacted his parents, Jack and Monica, as well as his brother, Trey, to see if they would be willing to participate in my study. He called me back to tell me his parents would be willing to participate, but that Trey had declined the request. I was a bit disappointed because I had hoped to include the perspectives from all the surviving family members. It was then that I realized how difficult it was going to be to get every family member to participate as I contacted more families in the future.

The third family I sent a letter to gladly offered to participate I believe in part because I volunteer with the mother, Vickie, at our local church grief support group every week. She has facilitated this group for years and asked for my assistance some time ago. We formed a friendship and she was more than willing to offer her help. I interviewed her, her husband, Paul, and her oldest son Christopher. Her youngest daughter, Julia, was only seventeen years old at the time and so she could not participate because of age limitations. Again, I was disappointed that not all the voices from the family would be heard.

As I brainstormed about how to find more families to participate, I remembered an acquaintance I knew from high school who had lost her sister. I attended the funeral and Katrina clung to me asking me questions directed at a

surviving sibling. I sent her the letter and she called me to let me know she would participate and that she would see if other family members would be willing to participate. After asking her family she informed me that her parents õmight come aroundö to the idea, but that she and her sister, Leslie, would be willing to participate immediately. Her hesitancy when speaking about her parents gave me the feeling that they might have disagreed with Katrina and Leslieøs participation in the study. This sense would be later confirmed during the interview when Katrina expressed her motherøs concern that she was going to air all of the familyøs õdirty laundryö for the world to read about. Nonetheless, Katrina and her sister agreed to participate.

Finally, I was introduced to Elizabeth and her family by a mutual friend. Our mutual friend knew I was looking for families to participate in my study and suggested to Elizabeth that her family might be a great fit and gave them my letter outlining the study. She contacted me and told me she would love to participate and so would her sister, Laura, and her mother, Elise. Her younger brother would not be able to participate because he was away at college and her mother and father were divorced and she didnøt think it would be a good idea to have both of them in the study. I was hoping she would let me interview her father, but I did not press the issue because she seemed adamant about not including both her mother and father for reasons unknown to me.

Initially I had hoped that the sample of participants would be mostly compiled of people I did not already know. In the end, I knew four out of the five families that participated prior to the interview process. Keeping this in mind, I

had to ask myself how my prior relationships with the participants might affect the research relationships. For example, I viewed Mark as an õexpertö because I only knew him as the facilitator of a surviving sibling support group. Riches and Dawson (1996) explain that õour status as interviewers and differences such as class, age, race and personality can have a major impact upon the intervieweeøs willingness to rehearse their own storyö (p. 357). Usually participants view the researcher as the expert but in Markøs interview I believe there was subtle evidence of a reverse power differential given his status as the õexpertö relative to me. I will discuss this in more detail in my analysis of Markøs narrative in Chapter 4.

I had already established a friendship with Elizabeth and I questioned how this would affect the interview process. I wondered if it would be easier for me to probe her for answers to questions that I may not feel comfortable doing with the other participants. I was also concerned that I may leave out important information that would inform the study simply because I already felt as though I knew it as a result of our established relationship. Understanding that the interview process is a õco-productionö of the interviewer and interviewee enables me to see how there are many different factors that go into a conversation and I have to acknowledge the nature of my relationship with the participants prior to the interviews and how this may impact the research.

Data Collection Procedures

The data for this project were gathered from February of 2009 through December of 2009. I conducted one in-depth interview with each family member

and then two interviews with the five participants that I feature in Chapters three and four (Johnson, 2002). The interviews were conducted in locations chosen by the participants, including their homes, an office, a coffee shop, and the local library. I began the interviews by explaining the goals of the study and reviewing the participant consent form (see Appendix A) that describes the purpose of my study, procedures and confidentiality, and potential risks. Interviews lasted from an hour to two hours. I used a digital audio-recorder to record the conversations for all of the interviews except for three.

In-depth interviews employ a conversational style to gain knowledge that concerns õpersonal matters, such as an individualøs self, lived experience, values and decisions, ideology, cultural knowledge, or perspectiveö (Johnson, 2002, 104). The pace and phrasing of the questions is dictated by the ebb and flow of the conversation. The goal was to elicit details of the family life including how family members coped with and struggled with the loss of their loved one as well as their perceptions on how other family members responded to the loss (Gordon, 1996; Riches & Dawson, 2000; Schwab, 1992). I find this method appropriate to use when discussing personal topics related to death, grief, and memorializing. I began the interviews by asking the family member to õtell me aboutö about the deceased person and then probed into the event surrounding the death. These initial questions usually started the conversation and because this study initially focused on ritual practices in relation to memorializing, I also asked open-ended questions about the choices the family made when memorializing the loved one. My questions included: Can you tell me about the ways you choose to

memorialize your loved one? Does your family have any rituals you used for remembering? Why have you chosen this particular ritual to remember you loved one? How does enacting the ritual make you feel? Are there certain rituals the siblings do not share with their parents and vice versa? Who had the idea to start the ritual and how was it explained to the participants? Related to shrines and artifacts I asked: What significance does the artifact serve in your loved oneøs memory? How did this space become a shrine? What makes it a shrine in honor of the loved oneøs memory? I usually ended the interview by asking the participant if they have any advice to give someone else going through a similar experience and if they had any final thoughts they would like to share.

For this research I engaged in participant observation as well as in-depth interviewing. The anthropologist, Jules Henry (1958), decided the best way to study families was to join them in their everyday activities. In his book, *Pathways to Madness*, he recounts his experience living with a family while they renegotiated how to function after a child was diagnosed with a mental illness. His findings were rich in detail and added much to the discussion of family therapy related to mental illness. Although I did not live with my participant families, I did try to spend concentrated time with them. I attended a birthday party with one family, and looked through old photo albums with another. Although I was allowed to accompany two of the families during ritual events, most of the families did not offer me access to observe their rituals. For example, in Barbara and Lonnieøs case, it was impossible for me to accompany them on their yearly trip to Colorado, a ritual they enacted in order to õfeel closer to our

son.ö Also, due to the fact that not all the family members felt comfortable participating in my research I was not allowed into those rituals that would include the uncomfortable family member. This limited my participant observation. However for those that did let me participate in their family rituals, I was able to facilitate a discussion pertaining to why they choose a particular ritual to commemorate their loved one, thus leading to a deeper understanding of their sensemaking processes.

I absorbed and documented how they communicated to one another and to me about the lost loved one before, during, and after the ritual event. I believe investing time with the families encouraged a deeper relationship, creating the space for richer discussions. I audio recorded whenever appropriate; otherwise, I kept field notes that enabled me to recount the event. I tried to include a reflexive awareness during this writing process, noting how my presence might have affected the conversation.

Data Analysis Procedures

After transcribing the interviews I read over my transcripts and fieldwork notes numerous times in order to become thoroughly familiar with them. I searched for content that stood out or I found surprising or puzzling as well as contradictions or inconsistencies among the different accounts from participants. I approached the data using a thematic structure to help identify possible topics or categories that I could use to organize the information. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). These categories can emerge from the participantsø data and can also õbe generated by borrowing or adapting existing concepts from literatureö (p. 211). I

drew heavily upon the three family ritual processes identified by Wolin and Bennett (1984), õtransformation, communication, and stabilizationô concepts whose roots lie in anthropology and ethologyö (p. 401). Using these three processes as a foundation, I was able to categorize the data related to family ritual and present my findings in the first analysis chapter using the three categories presented by Wolin and Bennett (1984): family celebrations, family traditions, and family interactions.

As often happens with research, õit is frequently well into the process of inquiry that one discovers what the research is really about; and not uncommonly it turns out to be about something rather different from the initial foreshadowed problemsö (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 206). My research exemplifies their point. Although the data touched on themes related to family ritual, much of it focused on other concepts. As I reviewed my data it became abundantly clear that the focus of this dissertation was not only how families are using ritual to aid in the grieving process but focused more on the intriguing ways individuals search for meaning after loss. Ritual was in fact only one tool the participants were utilizing for sensemaking purposes. At this point using thematic analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) did not quite work when I began to try to show the reader how the participants were using sensemaking strategies. To show the reader this process, it became clear that narrative analysis would be the best choice. There was always one family member within each family unit who was extremely open with their storytelling. It then became clear that by focusing on these individualsø stories I could show the reader how the story-telling aids a

person in the creation of narrative representations of events and, consequently, constructs a framework to comprehend the meaning of their experiences (Reason, 1988). Narrative analysis then became my method of choice for the remainder of the dissertation.

Unlike more traditional qualitative methods, narrative analysis õdoes not fragment the text into discrete content categories for coding purposes, but, instead, identifies longer stretches of talk that take the form and consequential events in a ÷worldø recreated by the narratorö (Riessman, 1990, p. 1195). Through narrative analysis I can examine the narrative structure used by the participant, which plays a part in how he or she goes about making meaning. To investigate how a participant structures and organizes his or her story is critical to the analysis. Again, I can focus on those questions related to content and what a person decided to share with me and how he or she communicated it.

The interviews were transcribed, and I analyzed the structure the participants used to interpret the narratives õboth as individual units and in relation to one another, by identifying thematic and linguistic connections between the narrative segments. Taken together, they constitute a tellerøs ÷narrative reconstruction,ø or ÷accountø of his or her lived experienceö (Kohler Riessman, 1990, p. 1195-1196).

Below, I will give a short synopsis of the five participants I used in my narrative analysis. More facts and specifics about each person will come from the participantøs narratives as a result of our interviews. I gave pseudonyms to all of the participants.

Mark

I interviewed the Stanton family including Jack (Father), Monica (Mother), and Mark (brother) whose in-depth interview is included in Chapter Four. I knew Mark from a sibling support group he facilitated that I attended the year my brother died. Our parents stayed in touch over the years and I reconnected with him after he expressed interest in participating in my research. He is in his late thirties, and married with two young daughters. Mark lost his youngest brother Brian in an accidental drug overdose ten years ago.

Elizabeth

I also interviewed the Jones family including Elise (mother), Laura (sister), and Elizabeth (sister), whose in-depth interview is included in Chapter Three. I met Elizabeth through a mutual friend and she agreed to be in the study enthusiastically telling me, õI would love to share my story in the hopes that it can reach other surviving siblings.ö She is a grade school teacher in her late twenties and is married with no children. Her sister, Ashley, died in a car accident when they were in high school.

Katrina

I interviewed the Warner family, Leslie (sister) and Katrina (sister), whose in-depth interview is included in Chapter Three. Katrina and I have known one another the longest out of all of my participants. We were only acquaintances before the interviews, but we attended the same high school. I asked her through a letter if she would be interested in participating in my study. At the time of our interviews she was twenty-two years old and beginning her graduate work.

Katrina lost her oldest sister Mary in an automobile accident the day after Katrina graduated from high school.

Barbara

The Greens asked to participate in my study. I interviewed Lonnie (father) and Barbara (mother), whose in-depth interview is included in Chapter Four. The first time I met Barbara was the day of our first interview. She kindly got in touch with me after she heard the letter I sent to the Compassionate Friends support group. Barbara is in her sixties and retired after many years in elementary education. She is married to Lonnie and has one living son, Tyler (40 years old), and a deceased son, Jordan, who died by suicide over ten years ago.

Paul

I knew the Little family from a grief support group I helped facilitate through my church. I interviewed Vicki (mother), Christopher (brother), and Paul (father), whose in-depth interview is included in Chapter Four. Paul and Vickie also have a daughter, Sarah, who was only seventeen at the time of the interview so she did not qualify for this study because of the age restriction. The Littles actually invited me to the eighteenth birthday party of their deceased son, Cooper. Their grief was more acute than the other families since it had only been a little over one year since they lost Cooper in an automobile accident.

CHAPTER THREE

FAMILY RITUAL

Family ritual connected with grief has become an increasingly popular topic for both academic researchers and practitioners who work with families (see for example, Grimes, 2000; Imber-Black, 1991; Romanoff & Ternzio, 1998; Shuchter & Zisook, 1988). Family members, including siblings, parents, grandparents and others, may sometimes feel compelled to memorialize their lost loved ones through ritual. Many clinicians encourage families to actively use rituals to aid in working through the bereavement process (Bolton & Camp, 1987; Fiese, 2006; Imber-Black, 1991). Researchers and practitioners seem to agree that family ritual can afford survivors an opportunity to find comfort by continuing an attachment to their lost loved ones (Attig, 1996; Vickio, 1999).

Wolin and Bennetøs (1984) early clinical research focused on the nature and function of rituals in alcoholic families. Their research addressed two questions; do some families protect their most treasured family rituals more than others? And if so, do the children in the families where the rituals were protected have an easier transition into adulthood, as opposed to those counterparts from ritual-disrupted families? Family ritual proved to have a positive influence on the childrenøs outcomes. Wolin and Bennett (1984) went on to define and categorize family rituals. They define family ritual as õa symbolic form of communication that, owing to the satisfactions that family member experience through its

repetition, is acted out in a systematic fashion over timeö (Wolin & Bennett, 1984, p. 401). Due to their repetitive nature and the shared meanings they create, family rituals are deeply intertwined with issues of family identity. Wolin and Bennett suggest that rituals contribute to a familyøs identity by õclarifying expected roles, delineating boundaries within and without the family, and defining rules so that all members know that this is the way our family isö (p. 401; see also Fiese, 2006; Imber-Black, 1991). Wolin and Bennet (1984) relied heavily on the anthropologistøs, Victor Turnerøs (1969) concept of õcommunitas.ö Turner noted that people who share a common characteristic tend to be drawn to one another and form what he described as communitas, or a heightened sense of connection. For the bereaved family, the commonality is the death of the loved one. õFor Turner, communitas reduces individual roles and elevates tribal identityö (Wolin & Bennett, 1984, p. 409). The enactment of rituals by survivors may promote a similar transformation enabling families to find a new family identity after death as well as to experience connectedness with one another.

In this chapter I present the analysis of my interviews and observations with particular attention to the kinds and meanings of rituals practiced within bereaved families. Initially, to guide my analysis I utilized the three ritual categories outlined by Wolin and Bennettt (1984): family celebrations, family traditions, and patterned family interactions. While these categories enabled me to begin to classify the rituals discussed by the participants, I found that certain kinds of ritual practices didnøt fit neatly into Wolin and Bennettøs categories. I

begin by describing my participation in a ritual practice enacted by the Little family under the category, family celebrations.

Family Celebrations

Iøve known the Little family through my parents for about a year, and I am honored that they feel comfortable inviting me to come to their home on the anniversary of Cooperøs 18th birthday. This would be an especially emotional day for the Littles because it is the first birthday since Cooperøs death almost one year ago. I have interviewed each family member individually, except the youngest member, seventeen year-old Sarah.

I pull up to the Littlesø house at 2:00 p.m. to find the long winding driveway lined with cars on either side. I park my car and make the long ascent to the house. The door is wide open with balloons attached to the front porch column. Is this usual? I donøt remember having a huge birthday celebration for my deceased brother. But then again, my family did organize a 5k race the first four years after Jeremyøs death to raise money for a non-profit we started in honor of Jeremy. Cooperøs death is still fresh for them, and I remember the need to do something in honor of Jeremy the years immediately following his death. I imagine the Littles are experiencing the same urge. Vickie greets me at the door with a huge hug. õWe are so glad you were able to make it! Please come in and make yourself at home.ö The foyer that leads to the large living room is lined with people, mostly young teenagers speaking softly to one another or looking around awkwardly, as if they donøt know what to say or do next. I squeeze my way through the mass of people toward the dining room. The table is full of

finger foods appropriate for teenagers; pizza slices, sandwiches, cookies, and brownies. It looks like a typical teenage birthday party, only the guest of honor is not going to be in attendance. No one has touched the food yet.

After what seems like an eternity, Vickie and Paul head to the front of the living room and ask for everyoneøs attention. õThank you all so much for coming today. As you know, today is a special day and instead of ignoring it, we would like to celebrate with those who knew Cooper and considered him a friend. Please, enjoy yourselves, eat with us some of Cooperøs favorite foods, share memories of him with one another, and have fun!ö After the Littles made the announcement, people seemed to make an effort to try to enjoy themselves, but it still seemed awkward.

I notice a group of young girls huddling in one corner of the dining room. I decide to walk over and ask the group collectively, õSo, how did yøall know Cooper?ö

One girl with curly blonde hair responds for the group, õWe were all in band together.ö

õI bet you had a lot of fun then. Would you go on trips together to perform?ö

They start giggling as the same girl responds, õYes, we would go on a trip every summer to perform. He was always the clown on those trips. He would pester and annoy us endlessly, but thatøs what made it fun. Cooper was so goofy.ö

I laugh too. õYes, I have heard he was quite the character. So, I understand today would have been Cooperøs 18th birthday?ö

õYes, and Mr. and Mrs. Little asked everyone in attendance to bring eighteen dollars to contribute to the foundation to replace the gift we would have brought to his birthday party. Because Cooper was in the band, and most of us are, it is a college scholarship fund for those students graduating from the band.ö

õThatøs cool. So, have any of you applied?ö

õI have.ö One of the other girls replies. õI think it would be neat if I received it, because then it would be like I am taking Cooper and his memory on to college with me.ö

We make chit chat for a moment more, and then I make my way to the living room and notice that everyone seems to be loosening up. There are a few openly shed tears, but for the most part people are laughing and talking. My attention turns towards what sounds like musical instruments coming from somewhere in the back of the house. I follow the music to a bedroom where I see about ten teenagers in what I perceive to be Cooperøs room. Vickie is sitting amongst them while four teenagers are playing the drums, guitar, bass guitar, and the keyboard. I notice she has tears streaming down her face as she smiles and listens to them. She sees me in the doorway, and motions for me to enter. I feel a sense of embarrassment for encroaching on what I know is such a sentimental moment for her, surrounded by Cooperøs friends. It isnøt the most beautiful blend of instrumental music I had ever heard, but the symbolism surrounding this moment

was moving. The way these teenagers chose to remember their friend and to share that with his mother seems cathartic for all involved.

After the teens tire of playing, the stories begin, and at this point Paul enters the room. I find it interesting that they all crowd into this small space. Before I know it everyone still at the party is in Cooperøs room. Each teen takes a turn and tells a story voluntarily about an experience with Cooper. The stories are often funny leading to eruptions of laughter and affirmation from the others in the room. Two and a half hours fly by and no one looks the slightest bit ready to leave. I donøt think the Littles are ready for anyone to leave either. But eventually other engagements demand these active high school seniorsø attention and they are giving their hugs to the Littles and thanking them for the opportunity to share about Cooper and play music. I canøt help but think that eventually they will most likely stop coming by. Most of them are going to college next year and moving on with their lives. Many of Jeremyøs friends vowed to drop by the house frequently, but still drifted away.

After the last person leaves, it is my turn to thank them for letting me attend. They are exhausted so I decide instead of immediately interviewing them; I would set up a time in the future. We make plans to meet individually in the future.

A number of factors stand out from this experience, for example the Littleøs desire to create a new ritual for Cooperøs Birthday. Grimes (1995; 2000) believes innovative rituals after a death in the family can inspire renewal in families. Romanoff and Ternzio (1998) promote the idea of creating new rituals,

õthe Mourner who plants a seedling in memory of the deceased acknowledges the loss, and waters and nourishes the sapling. Later, he or she sits in the shade of the treeö (p. 709). The Littles are focused on continuing the ritual of celebrating Cooperøs birthday, just now in a different way. Through the birthday celebration, they can continue a relationship with Cooper by inviting people who can share memories of him (Neimeyer et al., 2002). õThrough this ritualistic event, the deceased is transformed to an inner representation based on memory, meaning, and emotional connectionö (Romanoff & Ternzio, 1998, p. 700). It also gave a voice to Cooperøs friends, who before this party did not have a space to communicate their loss with the Little family. This process if further defined, õwherein possessions, creations, or shared experiences of the deceased are imbued with the spirit or memories of the dead, a process that evolves before the death but develops a higher valence only after the deathö (Shuchter & Zisook, 1988, p. 273).

Another noteworthy fact is the amazing effort the Littles put forth to plan and execute this party. The importance placed on this celebration is obvious with the amount of preparation, for example, supplying food for over two hundred people. The Littleøs act of throwing an eighteenth birthday party for Cooper also demonstrated the validity of his existence on earth, as well as how he will be remembered on this day in the future.

The birthday definitely took on a celebratory feeling, and it is because of that I had trouble categorizing it as a õfamily tradition.ö I found that it better fit under the family celebration category. Insofar as the Littles created an innovative

ritual to honor Cooperøs life and his birthday the Littles are rewriting the old traditions of past birthday celebrations.

Family celebrations are defined as those occasions that are largely practiced and shared within a culture and hold a special importance within the minds of family members. According to Wolin and Bennett (1984), this category includes, õrites of passage, such as weddings, funerals, baptisms, and bar mitzvahs; annual religious celebrations, such as Christmas, Easter, the Passover Sender; and secular holiday observances such as Thanksgiving, New Yearøs, or the Fourth of Julyö (Wolin & Bennett, 1984, p. 404).

Among the celebration rituals cited by Wolin and Bennett (1984) are holiday celebrations. As with lost loved onesø birthdays, deciding how to recognize these holidays is often a huge concern after loss, especially the first few holidays without the loved one. According to Imber-Black (1991), surviving family members are often encouraged by therapists to create new rituals for the holidays (see also Roberts, 2003). I was curious to know if my participants had done so, and if they found the new rituals to be helpful or enjoyable. I posed the question, õHow did you spend the first Thanksgiving, Christmas, or New Years after the death?ö

I discovered that some families found enacting new rituals during the holidays aided in their grieving process, while others found it just as painful if not more to acknowledge the holidays at all. They all agreed that something about the rituals surrounding the holidays is õjust not rightö without the lost member. There is and will always be that õelephant in the room,ö referring to the absence

felt by the survivors. Even though Vickie and her family staged an elaborate party to mark the first birthday after Cooperøs death in an automobile accident, she told me she refused to celebrate Christmas the first year after her son died. õI just couldnøt do it that year; I physically did not have the energy to put up our big Christmas tree.ö After much persuasion from her two children, Vickie relented and pulled out the Christmas decorations that year. The Littles decided to make the õbigö tree Cooperøs tree and decorated it with all of his home made and favorite ornaments. They kept that tree in the game room and the smaller more formal tree in the living room. Her son, Christopher said, õI appreciated that my mother agreed to do this. Now Cooperøs presence will continue to be a part of my holidays. We had a great time decorating and sharing memories of Cooper with one another.ö In this way they memorialize Cooper, even referring to the tree as õCooperøs tree.ö Another surviving sibling, Katrina, noted,

> The first time we encountered the holidays after Maryøs death was horrible! I remember my Mom saying, I donøt want to do anything that we have done before. I donøt want to do the same traditions. I do remember for Christmas we went somewhere different; I think we just went to an auntøs house or something instead of ours. I think we still decorated and everything, but it was just very awkward. I remember feeling like there was an elephant in the room, just no one wanted to talk about it. We would mention her name, but it was just weird.

Lonnie shared that he and Barbara decided to create a new family celebration during Christmastime after the death of their son,

> We got up on the morning of Christmas and decided that instead of concentrating on the fact that nobody was there to celebrate with us, we would get dressed and go deliver meals to the needy through our church.ö Barbara spoke of the same ritual saying, õWe would go to someoneøs apartment to deliver the meal and they would be all alone. You really start to realize that people are hurting everywhere and that you are not alone in your grief.

One of the most ornate ritual events enacted among most cultures is the funeral (Gillis, 1996). I found it a bit awkward to ask the participants about their experiences with the funeral, but because it is such a universally practiced ritual I did not want to omit it. It appeared that most of the participants were not uncomfortable with my questions related to the funeral, which made me feel more comfortable while asking them. Wolin and Bennett include funerals in the category of õcelebrationsö due to their standardized occurrence across most American families and the universality of symbols. It may be a bit surprising that a funeral is considered a celebration, but thinking about my own experience, it was very important to us as a family to make sure that Jeremyøs funeral was in fact a celebration of his life. While it is a very sad event, we felt the primary meaning for the funeral was to remember and celebrate his life. In addition, I was not the only one to view the funeral as a celebration of a life. The transcriptions from the participants described the funeral as profoundly painful, and yet also

reflected family membersøefforts to reshape them into an uplifting experience. For example, Laura, whose twin sister Ashley died in an automobile accident at the age of 16, emphasized the sense of õtogethernessö they felt as they planned her twin sisterøs funeral,

> The funeral was a collective effort and my Mom pulled all of us together and asked what we wanted to do and although it was really sad and hard it did really celebrate who Ashley was. We had lots of pictures and that was really therapeutic too because we got together and made huge collages. We had different people speak and tell stories. It was really a celebration of Ashleyøs life, and it was beautiful.

Similarly, Leslie and her sister Katrina wrote letters to their deceased sister, Mary, and they were read at her funeral, observing that õIt was everything we would have wanted to say if we could. It was a way to say goodbye.ö

Vickie, whose son died in an automobile accident, said it was important for her to make the funeral a celebration of Cooperøs life rather than a sad event. õThe rules society mandates in planning a funeral bothered me, like having to go to the funeral home and pick out a casket and plan the event. I didnøt want it to be called a funeral; I wanted it to be called a celebration. We made it more of a celebration by singing his favorite worship songs and reiterating this concept during the sermon.ö

In these three instances, it was important for the funeral to be a celebration of the deceasedøs life. As they reflected back on the event family members acknowledged that it was extremely hard to get through, but the love they felt

from all of the people who came to express their condolences was an overwhelmingly positive experience. Barbara, a surviving mother, commented, õit just meant so much to Lonnie (her husband) and me that so many people would come to Jordanøs funeral. The outpouring of love during that time made us feel that Jordanøs life was valued by so many.ö Christopher, a surviving sibling, was the only participant to express indifference towards the funeral, õit was just something we had to get through in order to move forward. I donøt really think about it very often.ö The funeral is most likely one of the largest family celebrations, but many of the participants in this study expressed other important rites of passage that proved to be another outlet to commemorate the lost loved one.

Leslie shared with me how important it was to remember her deceased sister, Mary, on Leslieøs wedding day. The family stood at the altar before the ceremony began outside and said a prayer and released butterflies in Maryøs memory. Leslie explained, saying, õI just couldnøt imagine Mary not being there on the most important day of my life. I had to acknowledge her life in some way. Our family used the butterfly as a description of Mary and her spirit, so it just seemed fitting to release them on my wedding day. It was my way of sending her a message that I miss her and wish she was here with me on this day.ö

Family Traditions

The rituals that fit into the category of family traditions are less culture specific and more distinctive to each family. They are not standardized rites of passage, but they do occur in families with regularity. Examples of family

traditions could be summer vacations, birthday and anniversary celebrations, participation in annual community events, and family reunions (Wolin & Bennett, 1984).

A common anniversary that survivors face every year is the anniversary of the loved oneøs death. The re-membering that takes place during this time is a creative response in performing the ritual of the anniversary (Grimes, 2000). Some family members refuse to acknowledge the death anniversary as any different from any other day. For example, Mark, a surviving sibling who lost his younger brother, couldnøt get far enough away from his family on the death anniversary. õThey wanted to come together, but I would rather experience the day in solitude.ö He explained he was going to be extremely sad on this day whether he did anything special to recognize it or not. He just wanted it to pass without much acknowledgement. In contrast, Leslie craved spending time with her family on the death anniversary, õI wish we could all be together, I think on those days we all want to be together. You just want to be surrounded by people who understand the significance of that day.ö Leslie is craving the safe environment that a family ritual on the death anniversary would provide her, reflecting Wolin and Bennettøs point that õThe rules and structure of the ritual make it a safe environment for the expression of such [intense] feelingsö (Wolin & Bennett, 1984, p. 410).

In contrast, Laura, Elizabeth, and their mother, Elise, make it a priority to be together and attend a conference every year that just so happens to fall on their sisterøs death anniversary. Ashley was a 16 year old twin when she died in a car

accident, and so they attend the Twinless Twins conference. This conference is sponsored by a non-profit organization that gives support to surviving twins and their families. Every year members congregate to share about their lost loved ones, socialize with other surviving twins, and participate in õgroups and activities that promote camaraderie and healingö (twinlesstwins.org). This sets this ritual apart from what Wolin and Bennett had in mind when they defined a family tradition because it is not only centered around family time, but the family members take it a step further and reach out to other members within the larger community of survivors. õItøs a really special time where we laugh, share memories with each other about Ashley, and talk about what she might be doing if she were alive today. It is a time of the year that I actually look forward to,ö Laura shared with me. Elizabeth encourages other families to õtry to do something to commemorate their siblings, whether itøs around the time of their death or not. It really just helps having that time with the family to celebrate the lost loved oneøs life.ö

Two out of the five families I interviewed mentioned the creation of a non-profit organization and the benefits that provided for them and their families. Ashleyøs family created a scholarship foundation to award money to students from Ashleyøs high school who wish to attend college. Laura, Ashleyøs surviving twin, noted that the process of setting up a scholarship foundation in her honor actually opened up more dialogue between her and her father. õMy Dad doesnøt talk about Ashley very much. He has a hard time still. This foundation has

opened up the lines of communication which has been good! He can speak about Ashley now, which I feel is very important to all of us (surviving siblings).ö

Christopher referenced the creation of the scholarship organization his family formed after the loss of his brother, Cooper, to be a family tradition that he now appreciates. õIt was a place to focus my energy, and it made me feel like something positive could happen out of this tragedy.ö Christopher and his family founded the Cooper Little Foundation that provides scholarships for high school seniors in the band. Cooper was passionate about the band, and so they felt as though he would be proud of this act. It was also a way that they felt connected to Cooper; an effort to keep his memory alive.

Within my own family, after we buried Jeremy and everything settled down, we looked at one another and asked, õWhat do we do now?ö We knew we wanted to do something special in honor of Jeremy, something more creative than what the funeral provided. We thought about starting a scholarship in his name, or donating to a church camp that he loved to attend every summer. The ideas flowed, but nothing seemed to match Jeremyøs personality and what he would have deemed as õcool.ö

Finally, my Dad came home one day with tan idea, õI think we should start a foundation in Jeremyøs memory.ö His initial idea blossomed with the help of the rest of the family into a nationally recognized non-profit organization. In the midst of our pain, we focused our energy into creating an organization that captured the heart of a beloved brother and son. The board consisted of the immediate family and one outside member. Quickly our plan was off and

running. The Jeremy Barnhill Foundation for Christian Teens existed to raise money to send teenagers who might not otherwise have the financial backing to attend a summer camp of their choosing. The concept of the foundation emerged from Jeremyøs passion to attend these summer camps. When he was alive, he would help his friends raise money to go with him to these Christian camps, so we found the concept for the foundation to correlate perfectly with his personality. The next move was to decide on an annual major fund-raising event. In one of the initial board meetings, the idea of the õRock nøRunö emerged.

We decided to hold a 5k run, and have a live band playing the Christian rock music he loved to play. This foundation and annual run, that we held every summer for five years, has affected my family in a number of ways. First, it provided an outlet for us to throw what little energy we had after the grief, into something positive, something we knew Jeremy would be proud of and want to be a part of if he was still alive. Secondly, the run felt more like a family reunion than a charity event. In the park, for four hours, five-hundred people showered us with their love and support for the cause. Many knew Jeremy, and others did not, but everyone there believed in what we were doing. The love we felt in the park was overwhelming. Thirdly, the foundation and race created a space for us to remember Jeremy in an awesome way. After the death of someone close, there is a fear that the world will forget how special your loved one was (Rosen, 1986). It created the opportunity to share memories and stories of Jeremy's life with friends at the run. It felt acceptable to openly share about Jeremy in this space because, it was in fact created for him. Honestly, I believe my family used the foundation to

fulfill a need we all felt inside to create a time and place to openly share and remember Jeremy. We created a ritual that served a crucial function in our healing as a family.

Friends and family shared with me that they appreciated that we created a day in which they could help and actually felt like they were doing something productive in supporting us in our grief. Often after a funeral, people will say, õI wish there was something else I could do to help the family.ö This provided a venue that gave them the opportunity to put that energy into supporting us, but also supporting a cause greater than our individual efforts could have achieved.

Creating the foundation and creating this new family ritual through the Rock nøRun helped my family to replace negative energy with positive energy. In giving back to society, a feeling of enlargement exists (Grimes, 2000). This foundation aided in my familyøs search for meaning and purpose in Jeremyøs life and death. It also created a paradigm for change in the grieving process by allowing others to participate in our journey. The blessings and healing that my family has found due to the ritual of the Rock nøRun are immeasurable.

Barbara and Lonnie, surviving parents, co-founded a support group that became a family tradition for them to do together. õWe created a space where we can always share about our son and in the process hopefully help others who are new to the anguish that is parental grief,ö Lonnie shared with me. They also go and speak to the local University Death and Dying class about their experiences losing a child by suicide. õThatøs been very rewarding for us. It always reminds us that you never know what other people are going through,ö Barbara shared.

Barbara and Lonnie also bought a condominium in the mountains where their son, Jordan, was living when he died. õItøs just a place for us to go once a year and I feel closer to him by being surrounded by the outdoors he loved so much. Itøs therapeutic to be in a beautiful place that he enjoyed, and to participate in those activities he did like mountain climbing and skiing,ö Barbara shared.

I also used the category of family interactions to help organize the information from the interviewees.

Family Interactions

Family interactions are the family rituals that are not overtly planned yet enacted on a more frequent basis. These interactions can evolve around dinnertime or bedtime routines or leisure activities on the weekends as a patterned behavior becomes habitual and expected (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). For the participants in my research, it is the disruption of these rituals that can evoke the most pain as, suddenly, the lost family member is absent from the dinner table, the car ride home from school, or helping with the dishes after a meal. For example, Katrina felt keenly the loss of bedtime conversation with her sister:

Mary and I shared a room while she was attending college and I was finishing high school. We would talk every night until we fell asleep. It was the night time that was the hardest for me. I felt the worst when I no longer had her to talk to at night.

Lonnie gave a similar account of missing his sonøs weekly phone calls, saying:

> Often Jordan would call Barbara and me on Sundays to tell us about his week. I got used to those phone calls and looked forward to them. For a

> while after his death, whenever the phone would ring on Sundays for an instant I would think itøs Jordan! But then it would all come rushing back, that he is not alive and cannot call us anymore. It was those mini-realizations that would bring the grief right back.

It is during these times of disruption to patterned interactional rituals that the family focuses on the ones who are not there (Wolin & Bennett, 1984).

In reviewing Wolin and Bennettøs categories, I noticed that while some important daily or weekly family interactions are interrupted following the death, new interactions are often established. These new rituals often form around the use of symbolic objects and special spaces or õshrines.ö Families use a plethora of symbolic artifacts, possessions that symbolize the familyøs relationship and attachment to the deceased member (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). Gillis (1996) explains, shrines and charms represent the life and death of a person and therefore are guarded as sacred, and cherished by the survivor. Katrina shared with me how she has utilized charms after her sister, Maryøs death. õI wear these diamond earring studs that Mary received from our parents on her 21st birthday. I will probably get a second hole pierced in my ears for when I receive my diamonds when I turn 21 this year. Wearing them makes me feel closer to her. I know this may sound weird, but that she is inside of me; figuratively, of course.ö She noted that one day, if a man asks for her hand in marriage she would like to include them in the band somehow. Leslie shared, õI got Maryøs cross, and on my wedding day, my husband had it imbedded in a larger diamond cross and gave it to me to wear on our wedding day. That was so special. I felt like she was there

with me.ö Leslie told a story about how her sister, Mary, came to be symbolized for the family in certain õcharmsö that gave the family comfort:

Multiple things happened with butterflies, just weird things. I had a friend who went to Europe and she came back with a piece of glass with a butterfly on it. She said, ÷I donøt know why but this just made me think about yøall.ø And then my aunt told us that Mary reminded her of a butterfly because she was graceful and beautiful. So anyway all these things started happening with butterflies and so now all my momøs friends give us a butterfly in everything you can imagine, picture frames, serving dishes, anything with a butterfly on it we have it. It is kind of our little thing.

Another example of a cherished object is the household collection of photo albums and videos that some of the participants found meaning in viewing after the death. Mark, whose brother passed away due to drug overdose, noted that:

> I looked through all of the photo albums right after he died and I think my family thought that that was weird. But my friends that were at the house with me would look at them with me, just to support me. I went through all his albums and at the time it didnøt really bring me grief, it made me happier.

Barbara filled a trunk full of all the artifacts the either belonged to her deceased son, Jordan, or reminds her of him. On those days when she would like to feel closer to him or remember him, she goes to the trunk and pulls out all of the artifacts individually. She practiced this ritual with me during one of our

interviews and I discuss it in length in Chapter Five. Paul, a surviving father, described his daughter, Sarahøs, habit of sleeping in her deceased brotherøs room. õWe canøt convince her to stop sleeping in Jordanøs room. She says she likes being surrounded by all of his things.ö In contrast to those who found comfort in the sight, smell and touch of valued artifacts, Markøs father, Jack, shared that he does not find comfort in looking at old photographs and does not even like them to be up in the house. Barbaraøs husband does not participate in the trunk ritual that is so important to Barbara, õLonnie just doesnøt place as much value on these things like I do,ö Barbara told me. As these examples show, two family members in the same system may hold completely different feelings about an artifact. Symbolic, affective meanings are not necessarily shared by family members in the sense that what brings comfort to one can have very painful affects for another.

When a person dies, most of his or her possessions are given õsacredö status (Gentry et al., 1995). Often conflict can ensue within a family when the decision arises as to what to do with the deceasedøs possessions. The siblings in this study expressed the most opposition to the disposing, selling, or giving away of the deceasedøs possessions. Vickie described her daughterøs dismay when she decided to redecorate her deceased sonøs, Cooperøs, room. Because Sarah had been sleeping in his room ever since his death, Vickie and her husband, Paul worried this wasnøt exactly healthy behavior. Vickie found the releasing of Cooperøs possessions to be sad, but therapeutic at the same time. õIt was a time for remembrance. I cried a lot, but afterward I felt as if we were finally moving forward. Life goes on, you know. I couldnøt pretend anymore for Sarahøs sake

that nothing had changed.ö Sarah and her parents symbolize the struggle or tension felt among family members between stability and change when it comes to the deceasedøs possessions.

Barbara expressed her continued concern as to what her living son, Tyler, would do with the symbolic possessions she kept of Cooperøs in a trunk. õWill Tyler even know how special these things are to me, or will he dispose of them?ö

Shrines, sometimes referred to as altars serve as a place to represent the relationship or the value the deceased person had in our lives (Lifepath, 2008). We go there to mediate, remember, pray, or perform some other type of spiritual practice. One of the most obvious shrines for the deceased is the cemetery. In centuries past, the cemetery served as a space where the past visited the present; the living visited the dead. Visiting the cemetery was a ritualistic act that provided extended mourning for families. The ritual disappeared after the First World War (Gillis, 1996). I asked the participants in this study if they ever visit the gravesite, and how it makes them feel when they do. Paul, who lost his son, Cooper, in a car accident, believes some of his family members go, but they never discuss it, õIt is a very personal experience, I would assume a spiritual one, so I donøt ask the kids if they go.ö

Mark, a surviving sibling noted, õI donøt ever go to the cemetery. I go into his room and take a nap on his bed. I can feel him there; I canøt feel him at the cemetery.ö I probed him further asking why he thinks he feels this way. He responded, õBecause I believe his body was just a shell, and I donøt want to go and have to think about a decaying body. I would rather remember him through

photos, and telling stories about his life. The cemetery does nothing for me.ö Elizabeth told me the story of finding her sister lying beside her deceased sister grave. õShe spent the night out there. We couldnøt find her, and we started to panic. I remember her saying that she felt closest to Ashley at the gravesite, so I drove out there and found her passed out. It was so sad; she was covered in red ant bites. Now every time I go to the cemetery, I think about that, so I donøt go very often.ö

Monica, Markøs mother told me she only goes to the gravesite to make sure the flowers are properly situated, and that aesthetically things are in the right place.

As illustrated in these interviews, one of the most common shrines of the dead does not serve a ritualistic purpose for the surviving families in this study. Apparently Gillis (1996) is correct in his assertion that very few people use the grave site as a place to congregate and remember the lost loved one. No one I interviewed said that they go to the grave site often.

These examples illustrate how the significance of each symbolic object or ritualistic performance is decided and validated by the family. And the validity of the rituals are reconfirmed every time the family practices them (Wolin & Bennett, 1984).

The families in this study found many different ways to revise their rituals in aftermath of loss, for example, the Littleøs creation of the õCooper treeö on the first Christmas after they lost Cooper and Barbara and Lonnieøs new ritual of going to the food bank to serve Christmas dinner instead of spending the day

alone. The families also created ritual forms that did not exactly fit into the existing categories given by Wolin & Bennett (1984). Elizabeth, Laura, and Eliseøs participation at the Twinless Twins Conference did not synch perfectly with the õfamily traditionö category because of the interactions they had with people outside of their nuclear family during the conference. The examples of the families who set up scholarship foundations and non-profit organizations engage in a kind of activism where they reach out to wider community. This serves a multitude of purposes. A major one being the preservation of the deceasedøs memory through this tradition. It also built a sense of community and a place for survivors to share about their loved one with others in attendance.

As I continued to review the transcriptions for the interviews it became clearer that the focus of this dissertation was not only the meanings behind the ritualistic practices of families after a loss, but how the individuals in these families were searching for a larger meaning in the loss. Ritual was in fact only one of many tools the participants were utilizing for sensemaking purposes. To understand how sensemaking occurs through the õrestoryingö process, I analyzed my interviews through the lens of narrative analysis. By concentrating on a particular individual in each family I could show the reader how story-telling aids a person in the creation of narrative representations of events and, consequently, constructs a framework to comprehend the meaning of their experiences (Reason, 1988). A narrative analysis of one memberøs account from each family then became my method for the remainder of the dissertation. In each case, I chose the family member who was the most open and reflective. In the following chapter I

analyze the stories I elicited with three different surviving siblings from three of the different families. In the final analysis chapter, Chapter Five, I share the interview stories from two of the surviving parents from different families.

CHAPTER FOUR

SIBLINGSøPERSPECTIVES

Mark's Story

I wonder if I will know anyone at this surviving sibling support group, I think to myself as I make the 10 minute drive to the meeting. I imagine a room full of tearful grief-stricken surviving siblings. I shudder as I think about the pain they are enduring, but Iøm appreciative I have been invited by Mark to attend this meeting.

The Stantons told my parents that their son, Mark, still facilitates the only local support group for surviving siblings. I remember how helpful I found his bereavement support group immediately after my loss. Even though my own brother, Jeremy, died over eight years ago, I still feel appreciative thinking about the opportunity to talk to others who understand what it is like to lose a sibling.

The room is filled with six people sitting in a small circle in the center of the room. Mark rises to greet me. õHi Julia. Welcome to our group, we have been expecting you,ö he says enthusiastically. We shake hands, and I am instantly drawn to the warmth Mark exudes. õI want to introduce Julia to you all. She lost her brother when she was in college and has devoted her graduate research to surviving siblings. She has asked to interview me for her research, and I thought it might be helpful for her to come to one of our meetings to see what we do here.ö A few of the participants smile sheepishly at me, and I smile

back. I remember how acute the pain was during those initial stages in the grieving process and how much energy it took to even produce a smile. It seems like an eternity ago and yet in other ways like yesterday.

There is a chair waiting for me next to a woman with cropped dark hair and glasses. She is probably in her early thirties and does not look at me as I sit down beside her. It is uncomfortably quiet while Mark takes a seat next to me on the opposite side.

After a few moments, Mark begins, õToday we are sharing about a common stage of grief, anger. Anger is a natural reaction to loss, and I donøt personally believe you should feel guilty for having feelings of anger towards your lost loved one or towards other people. I know when Brian died; I had an enormous amount of anger toward the doctor who prescribed him a lethal dose of medicine. I think that we should begin by identifying healthy responses to anger.ö The woman sitting beside me visibly exhales while Mark explains his own experiences with anger. I imagine she feels relief to know that those feelings are okay and even expected after death. As the meeting proceeds, the participants prove more comfortable and begin to share their feelings of anger or feelings in general.

I leave this initial meeting with Mark excited about the talks we will have in the future concerning sibling bereavement and intrigued to find out the details surrounding his personal story as well as the feelings of anger he vividly shared with the support group. We set up a time to meet again at a different time and place in the future.

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It has been about three weeks since I last saw Mark facilitating his surviving sibling support group. I take the elevator to the fifth floor of the library, our agreed meeting place. I see Mark facing the full length windows. He turns around when he hears me approaching.

õItøs a lovely view from up here.ö He is referring to the winding bayou that curves its way around the University campus.

Mark dresses professionally in khaki pants, and a collared shirt appropriate for his occupation as a local drug sales representative. He is in his mid to late thirties and wears a large smile that makes me feel welcome. õWhat do you have for me today Julia?ö he asks as we take our places in two comfy chairs and I set up the digital recorder on the coffee table.

õWell, okay then, Iøll just dive right in with the first question. Tell me about your relationship with your youngest brother, Brian.ö

õWe actually grew closer right before he died because he came out to live with me in Salt Lake City, Utah for about a month. We did a lot of snow skiing and just really bonded during that time. . . . It was a rough time for him in his life, but I appreciated the opportunity to have one-on-one time with him.ö

õMy sister, April, knew Brian in high school. She always talked about how nice he was and of course good-looking!ö

We laugh together. õYeah, he had a way with the ladies.ö

I struggle with how to turn the conversation towards the more serious subject matter of how Brian died without it being awkward or a bit jarring. I hope

that because Mark is already familiar with my research interests, the conversation will naturally flow towards the circumstances surrounding Brianøs death. õWould you mind telling me more about Brian?ö

õSure, he moved back home and was trying to get his life back in order. He had struggled with drug addiction for years. Mom and Dad had agreed to let him stay with them while he went through rehabilitation. He had a doctor who was monitoring his progress and treating him. This doctor was well-respected in the community and a good family friend of ours. He gave Brian a drug to help ease some of the withdrawal symptoms. Brian followed the prescription directions, but the drug proved to be too powerful for his system. Mom and Dad woke up one Sunday morning, checked on him and found him sleeping, and then left to attend church. When they returned my Dad found him lying in his bed lifeless. That was ten years ago now.ö

Markøs succinct account of these events has the quality of a story that has been told many times. Yet, after õten yearsö it still seems fresh. His story, like the version I heard earlier from his father, Mark Senior, attributes primary responsibility for Brianøs death to the doctor. In fact, by calling particular attention to the doctorøs identity as a õwell-respectedö õfamily friend,ö Markøs account seems to make the final outcome all the more surprising and disturbing.

Mark describes the death as an outcome of several causally linked events (in this case, years of addiction and then rehabilitation) followed by a precipitating event: the prescription of a drug for withdrawal. Interestingly, Markøs parents are prominent figures in Markøs story; in his telling of the story,

they allowed Brian to move back home, supervised his recovery, and then found his body. Rather than describing his own perspective, he seems to report events through their eyes.

I learned from Markøs father that the Stanton filed a medical malpractice suit against the doctor. Mark Senior did not divulge the outcome of the lawsuit, only that they battled with the doctor for many years following Brianøs death. I wonder how this ongoing conflict affected the family system and if Mark is as passionate as his father is as far as issuing blame. I try to continue the topic of malpractice by asking, õDid Brianøs doctor ever admit blame in Brianøs death?ö

õNo, and I think for legal reasons that would not make sense. I will see him around town every now and then, but we never speak. I will tell you, I think my Dad focused much of his energy into seeking retribution from the doctor. How productive that has been in his grieving process I am not sure. I donøt think he has made peace with the doctorøs malpractice. I believe the doctor made a deadly mistake, but I have not made it my lifeøs purpose to seek justice. I think that keeps a person from moving forward in grief.ö

One way of imposing order to seemingly senseless events is to allocate blame. Mark and his father seek vindication for Brianøs death by issuing blame on the doctor as they recount the events surrounding the death. The recounting of events in sequence implies that Mark has achieved a õcausal understandingö of his brotherøs death. However, a causal explanation may not be enough. Bereaved family members often seek õa deeper philosophical meaningö (Davis et al., 1998, p. 730) that goes beyond mere causal explanation.

õHas your fatherøs legal pursuit affected your relationship with him?ö

õNo, because I understand why he is consumed by it. I had feelings of anger towards the doctor, but I eventually let them go. I think it is just taking him longer to get there and maybe rightfully so, Brian was his son.ö

õThis adds a new perspective for me when considering sibling grief. In my experience there was really no one else to blame because Jeremy was the one driving the car. I never had to deal with those issues of blame and anger towards another human being for Jeremyøs death.ö

õYes, that adds a whole new dimension to your grief.ö

Mark implies that his father has an excessive focus on blame when he says that Mark Senior is õconsumed by it.ö Blaming in response to grief has been described by researchers as falling into three different categories: self-blame, other-blame, and revenge seeking (Wienberg, 1994). Mark seems to put his fatherøs behavior in the category of revenge seeking, implying that this has delayed his fatherøs grieving process. His account echoes what I have found in studies of bereavement through both death and divorce: that bereaved individuals who seek revenge are more likely to have a prolonged grief experience (Field & Bonnano, 2001; Wienberg, 1994).

We sit for a minute with our thoughts on these issues of blame, and I decide to steer the interview in a different direction to maximize the time I have with Mark. I continue, õHow did you cope with the death? I know you were living away in Salt Lake City at the time.ö

õYeah, I had to go back and deal with it alone. I didnøt have the face-to-

face interaction with my family, just phone calls and you know I think in a way that forced me to confront it. I also did a lot of writing during that time.ö

õSo, you didnøt have anyone is Salt Lake City to talk to after Brianøs death?ö I ask.

õWell, you would think my wife would want to share that grief with me, but she actually seemed more annoyed by Brianøs death than worried about how I was doing.

I think she was almost jealous of the energy it was taking for me to grieve and the fact that I couldnøt give it all to her as I had done beforeö

õWow, I remember wishing I had a significant other to confide in during that time, but your experience proves that a significant other is not always able or willing to give the support a grieving individual would expect.ö

õYeah, in all honesty, I think that was the beginning of the end of our demise. So not only did I have to grieve Brianøs death, but also the death of my marriage.ö

Markøs story intertwines the events of his brotherøs death with the collapse of his marriage; this theme of secondary losses appearing after the major loss is one I will hear in other interviews. For example, Barbara, a surviving mother, describes her realization that she will never know the joy of having grandchildren. What is interesting in Markøs account is how his divorce narrative also makes causal connections (in the form of his wifeøs failures to be supportive after his brotherøs death) as a way of explaining the divorce. Mark continues, õBut, you know, as awful as that time was, I would not take any of it back, because it helped

shape me into who I am today. I have a wonderful relationship with my present wife and two beautiful daughters. I know all of that had to happen in order for me to be happy today.ö

Mark will be my only participant who actually says that he would not change the events that have transpired in his life, including the death of his sibling. In this sense, he fits into the category of what Nolen-Hoeksema and Larson (1998) has termed õbenefit-findingö in the face of loss. She notes that people who seek out the silver lining in a loss and are able to identify how their lives have changed for the better usually have an easier time adapting after the loss. Benefits after a death typically fall into three categories: growth in character, gain in perspective, and strengthening of personal relationships (Davis et al., 1998). Mark illustrates a growth in character when he recognizes that his loss has õhelped shape me into who I am today.ö He also exemplifies the benefit of a strengthening in personal relationships when he talks about the strong relationship he has with his current wife and two children.

After a death, every survivor searches for meaning, but according to several authors, it is those who can actually find something positive who are the only ones who have truly adapted (see for example, Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1998). As Janoff-Bulman and Frantz (1997) argue, õSuccessful adaptation involves first trying to make sense of the event, and then finding some benefit or value in the experience for oneøs lifeö (p. 216) I can honestly admit I havenøt arrived at this understanding in my own life. If I could take Jeremyøs death back, I would do it in a heartbeat. Does this mean I havenøt fully coped with my own

grief after eight years? I will acknowledge some positive things that have resulted from Jeremyøs death, but not enough to wish for its occurrence.

I continue, õYou mentioned being concerned about your parents. I know personally, I have a heightened attachment to my parents that Iøm not sure would be there if Jeremy had not died. I became extremely protective of them; like it was my mission to keep them away from anything that could possibly cause them more pain. Unfortunately, thatøs not a possibility. I just cringe at the thought of them having to endure yet more pain in this world.ö Many surviving siblings feel the need to be strong for their parents and try to ease or minimize their pain in some way (Horsley & Patterson, 2006).

õI definitely had a similar experience. At the time I was just so worried about everyone and I felt so out of touch because I was so far away.ö Itøs comforting to know I am not the only one who feels overprotective of my parents. Mark continues, õBut I had to pull it together because I had a job and I was single, and I just couldnøt afford to fall apart. Back home, Trey, my youngest brother was struggling, Dad seemed to just be going through the motions, and my Mom was just a basket case. My heart was back home, and I felt like I needed to be there with them, so I decided to move back home.ö

õI had a similar experience. I graduated from college about eight months after Jeremyøs death and had always planned to go away for graduate school. When the time came, with the persuasion of my family I decided to go forward with my plans and move to Baton Rouge, Louisiana and attend graduate school. I donøt believe I even gave Baton Rouge a chance. I made it two weeks, and then

called my Dad and told him I was moving back. Maybe it was the timing of Jeremyøs death, during my college years, but I feel in a way it deterred me from truly spreading my wings and detaching from my parents. In many ways, this is not a bad thing. My relationship with my parents is strong, and I am so grateful for the time I have been able to spend with them. But I do think I consciously or subconsciously make decisions with them in mind. Honestly, at this juncture in my life, I am petrified to lose them. I just feel a heightened obligation to be present for my parents. Whether that is healthy or not, and whether or not I will regret that in the future, Iøm not sure.ö I think Mark and I would agree that our parents have experienced enough hurt for one lifetime with the loss of child, and we feel the need to try to protect them from further pain no matter what personal sacrifices we have to make along the way. I am reminded of the idea that many surviving siblings consciously, õkeep their feelings and other responses secret in an effort to protect their parents,ö (Robinson & Mahon, 1997, p. 479) and that this behavior is identified as õprohibited mourningö (Rosen, 1986). Siblings may behave this way due in part to the societal belief that the death of a child is the worst type of loss. This has a way of silencing surviving siblings, thus placing them in the category of the õdisenfranchised grieverö (Doka, 1989).

õI can understand what you mean,ö Mark resumes. õI think it was really good for them and actually for me when I came home. My Dad and I would talk about Brian all the time and I think I was truly able to grieve during that time. And eventually I was able to move forward. I met my now wife, and as a result have two beautiful daughters. The same will happen for you, I am sure of it. You

will find someone and create a family of your own, and then you will be able to detach somewhat from your Mom, and Dad.ö

Itøs interesting that Mark chooses the words õI was truly able to grieveö hinting that for some time before this period his grief was stifled. This seems to signify some kind of active process. Whatøs also interesting about this passage is his effort to telescope a large amount of time that surely had its own set of ups and downs when he says, õAnd eventually I was able to move forward. I met my now wife, and as a result have two beautiful daughters.ö Mark edits the õwholeö story to make a point that life revolves around the people you love. Again, Mark exerts quite a bit of agency as opposed to passivity in his narrative.

õI hope that is the case. I would love to have a family of my own one day.ö

õYou will, you will.ö

As we conclude the interview, I notice that Mark has shifted from answering questions to giving me reassurance. He speaks to me from the vantage point of one who has achieved a longer-term perspective on his loss. Here, too, he maintains his positive stance that his life has been enriched through Brianøs death, a recurring theme throughout our interviews. We end this interview because Mark and I both have to return to work. We decide to meet at the local Starbucks the following week.

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The Starbucks on the university campus is buzzing with students. It is finals week and they are out and about in droves. Mark and I grab a coffee and decide to sit at a small table outside under an umbrella to try to escape the student

traffic. I hope to continue our conversation about family reactions to a death and especially inquire about Markøs brother Trey, who declined to be a participant in this research. I begin, õHow do you believe Trey reacted to the loss? Did you both grieve in different ways?ö

õYes, my brother was not open to communicating his grief with anyone, especially us. I donøt feel like Trey has found anything positive that has surfaced from Brianøs death. He just holds onto a lot of resentment and has chosen to go in another direction.ö

õSo, I take it you definitely noticed a difference in the family dynamics?ö

õYes, I mean was it really Brianøs death that brought about all this change in my family? Iøm not sure if you can blame all of the drama on that, but I think it definitely rocked us to the core for a while. Maybe when death descends on a family, it sheds a light on those problems that already exist causing them to surface.ö

õWow, I have never thought of it that way. I do know that everything negative that happens to our family, we usually attribute back to Jeremyøs death, but can you really blame everything on that? And for how long do you get to use that card?ö

õI know. During the whole experience and thereafter I have had the motto, life is what it is, and you just have to make the best out of it. Brian died, I got divorced, had a job change, and made a 2,000 mile move, but hey it is all about attitude, and I think I have come out on the other side.ö

Mark makes it clear he does not feel that Trey has appropriately grieved for Brian. I can relate to this belief. After Jeremyøs death, I think each member of my family judged how other members were grieving, and if they were doing it correctly or not. This mutual awareness of one anotherøs grieving reflects the systemic nature of the family as an emotional unit (Bowen, 1976) in which members react to one anotherøs needs, anxiety, and distress. Mark describes Trey as õnot open to communicating his griefö and that Trey õhas not found anything positive from Brianøs death,ö while he describes his own grief as a way of õtruly being able to move forward.ö After time and research on grief work, I have realized that grief is as unique as individual personalities. Although it does not fit into a definable exercise, or five stages, cultural norms are placed on doing grief correctly (Rosen, 1986; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1991; Stroebe, 1994).

Mark continues, õI donøt think my brother shares the same philosophy. He just holds onto so much resentment. That resentment spills over into his present relationships with Mom, Dad, and me. I know it hurts Mom and Dad that he rarely comes around, and when he does, he refuses to even speak about Brian. That makes me mad. To this day I am still very protective of Mom and Dad and their feelings.ö Then he asks, õHow did your sister react to Jeremyøs death? Was it different from you?ö

õYes and no. Yes, in the fact that we both openly grieved, and no in the fact that she had a husband and had that extra support. I didnøt have that and subsequently turned to my parents during that time.ö

õYeah, I know what you mean. When my marriage fell apart after Brianøs death, the only people I really had to confide in were my parents. Trey had his now wife, and then he never was one to express his feelings in the first place.ö

õIsnøt it interesting how two siblings can have such different reactions?ö

õYes, to this day I donøt feel like Trey has truly grieved for Brian. It bothers me, but there is nothing I can do about it. And I know he feels like Mom, Dad, and I judge him negatively for it. Now, I have my wife and two little girls and I realize the importance of making sure they have a strong relationship with their grandparents on both sides. That just does not seem to be important to Trey and I see it hurt my parentøs feelings. The fact that it is my own brother who is the culprit disturbs me even more.ö

One way to analyze Markøs account is in terms of what it reveals about how family members react to one anotherøs grief. As he talks about (and criticizes) Trey, Mark implies a schism between the two of them since Brianøs death that could be related to different stylistic approaches to grief. Gilbert (1989) recognizes that family members often have mismatched grief, meaning family members experience different levels of grief intensity at different times. One family member may experience little to no sadness for a period of time while another family member is consumed by sadness within the same time period. This can lead to more stress on the family system: õYet in order to maintain the family as a functioning entity, family members must recognize the loss, reorganize after the loss, and reinvest in the familyö (p. 269). According to Mark, Trey has not taken these last crucial steps. Mark may feel as though he has not

only lost one brother but two. In my interview with Elizabeth, another surviving sibling, she shares a similar experience of loss connected to her relationship with her other living sister, a common experience in bereaved families (Rosenblatt, 1996). Grief can be consuming and debilitating, leaving a small amount of energy to devote to attending to familial relationships. The sense of losing not only the deceased sibling, but also other surviving siblings is usually felt over a longer period and can occur within different family members over a lifespan.

However, while Markøs story provides, on one level, a glimpse of the familyøs emotional dynamics, I find on later reflection that the structure of his narrative is also revealing. For example, Mark acknowledges how Trey most likely feels judged by him. However, whereas he describes his parentsø ways of grieving, he does not give many details about his brother or show him in much complexity, other than to portray Trey in opposition to himself. He characterizes Trey as not having truly grieved, as õholding onto resentmentö implying that he himself does not. He presents himself, unlike Trey, as valuing family relationships with grandparents. The overall effect of this self-positioning in contrast to Trey, is to portray himself as õgrieving well,ö thus supporting the claims of narrative researchers that participants strive to manage their presentation of self in research interviews. Linde (1993) explains that when participant narrate their experiences they look at the self reflexively in an effort to õestablish the moral value of the selfö (p. 122) to others.

As I sit listening to Markøs story, however, I feel some understanding of the family tensions he describes. õMy parents and my sister and brother-in-law

have had their share of heartache after Jeremyøs death, mainly due to mixing business with family. That just never seems to work.ö

õI can empathize with you on that one.ö

õTheir relationships have improved. But it was really touch and go there for a while. I wondered if they would ever have a relationship again. That added to everyoneøs grief, because we were such a strong family before Jeremyøs death. But like you said, I wonder if those problems were already there, and Jeremyøs death just brought them to the surface.ö

õYeah, I definitely think it is a combination of the two. It just puts stress on every relationship in the family; all the way around.ö

I visualize the problems that transpired within my family after Jeremyøs death as a snowball chain of events, similar to the ones Mark describes.

õYeah, it was just one thing after the other, first the intense grief, the lawsuit, my divorce, Treyøs refusal to even say Brianøs name, our strained relationship with Trey and his family. I know I am sounding negative, but all of these things seemed intensified after the loss. Do you know what I mean?ö Here again there is a sequence of negative events that Mark seems to see as connected, suggesting that perhaps Mark has found a way to make the events surrounding Brianøs death intelligible to himself but not through the positive reframing that I initially thought he had attained.

Because Mark was willing to openly share with me about the negative affects Brianøs death has had on his family, I feel comfortable sharing some of mine with him. õAbsolutely,ö I continue. õAs a family we act like we have it all

together, but we have our family conflict and secrets just like every family. I honestly feel like life was perfect before Jeremy died, and after we have fallen apart. On the outside looking in most people wouldnøt believe me. It started with my Dadøs back pain and subsequent surgery, and then my brother-in-law had back surgery. My mom broke out in shingles due to the stress. My dad lost his zeal for work and that made my brother-in-law feel like he deserted him in the family business. When Adams started to have those feelings, they spread over to my sister and she started to resent my Dad. That fiasco eventually led to my brother-in-law separating from the partnership they had at work. Things are better now after that decision was made, and after both couples agreed to go to counseling together. Shortly after Jeremyøs death, my sister tried to have a baby and was unable to conceive. It broke her heart, again. I immediately started dating a fellow student from college and my parents immediately disapproved and told me so. It devastated me and sent me into a downward spiral. For years I hung onto a relationship that I knew in my heart was not good for me, but in my stubborn nature wanted to prove to everyone, especially my parents that they were wrong and Daniel and I were going to make it. I was miserable for 5 years. Daniel and I eventually got engaged and I was filled with so much inner torment over the situation that I called off the wedding four months before it was supposed to happen. Iøm thankful that I didnøt get married, but now I feel like I wasted that time on a pointless relationship. All of these hardships I tend to attribute back to Jeremyøs death, is that realistic?ö Markøs story has rung true to me as he discusses the not so perfect aspects of family life after grief. I see my experiences similar to

his in the areas of parental protectiveness and judgment of other family members. We diverge in how we view our lives now, and I find myself admiring his attempts to find value in the events following Brianøs death. It is encouraging to know that another sibling has experienced similar dysfunctions in the family after the loss, and I am asking genuinely for his input as a seasoned surviving sibling.

õI think it is normal. Realistic, Iøm not sure. Donøt you think some of those things would have transpired regardless of Jeremyøs death?ö

õIøm not sure, but like you said. It is all in the way you look at life and the attitude you have. Along with all the hardship that my family had to endure, we have had many positive experiences as well and our relationships are on the path to restoration. My sister was eventually able to have two little girls. I was able to attend graduate school and eventually move away and start a life for myself. Maybe it is all in perspective.ö

õI think so. Like I said before, there is no doubt in my mind that I would not be where I am today without all of those horrible things happening to me and my family. Now, I canøt speak for the rest of my family. But I know that I feel that way.ö Mark reverts back to his õbenefit-findingö perspective of life after Brianøs death. I believe he would like to conclude on this positive note.

õWhat incredible perspective. You truly are an inspiration to me and I know you are for many other surviving siblings.ö

õWell, thank you so much Julia, I hope maybe my story can reach someone else who is struggling, and show them that no matter how awful circumstances get, there will be wonderful times again.ö

õThank you so much for your message Mark. It has been a privilege getting to know you and hearing your story.ö

õSame here Julia. Good luck with everything.ö

õThanks!ö

Initially in our interviews, I was a bit skeptical of how positively Mark framed his life now after Brianøs death. When he said õI would not be where I am today without all of those horrible things happening to me and my familyö I struggled to make sense of that world view. I understand that lives can be positively impacted through a loved oneøs tragic death in a number of ways (Davis et al., 1998) perhaps through a reignited passion for life or a deeper appreciation for present relationships, but I still have a difficult time attributing the positive circumstances of my life to the death of my brother. I would take Jeremyøs death back in an instant. My conversations with Mark raised questions about my own grief work and my understanding of it. I compared my adjustment to his, partly because he says he õwould not reverse the outcomeö because it all worked out for him in the end. He believes his present happiness with his wife and children would not be had Brian not passed away. I question why I cannot view my own life with an understanding that I would not be where I am today had Jeremy not died. There may be some truth to that, but I cannot help but think my life would be even better if Jeremy had lived. Another reason I believe I give so much weight to Markøs thoughts on sibling grief is because I still view him as a facilitator for a bereavement support group, thus thinking of him as an expert. I

cannot help but wonder whether Markøs form of benefit-finding is necessary for full adjustment to loss.

I also left the interviews feeling like Mark taught me much about the changes in the family dynamics after loss. Sharing his familyøs struggles encouraged me that my family is not the only one facing trials after a death, regardless of how much time has transpired.

I conducted the following interviews with Elizabeth, another surviving sibling.

Elizabeth's Story

I knock on Elizabethøs door at exactly 7:00 p.m., just as we planned. The door swings open and Elizabeth greets me with a huge smile. õHi Julia! It is so good to see you again.ö

õItøs great to see you too! Thank you so much for meeting with me tonight.ö

õNo problem. I love any chance I can get to talk about my sister. I know this may sound strange, but I have been looking forward to our meetings and to the opportunity to share about losing a sibling with someone who understands. I just never really get to talk about Ashley anymore.ö Iøm not sure why I worry that my participants dread these interviews. How easily I forget my own appreciation for someone who is interested in hearing about my deceased brother.

I walk into Elizabethøs home and am immediately impressed by the size. The foyer opens into a large living room with an overstuffed leather couch in the center of the room. The living room flows into an open-concept kitchen. The

high twenty-foot ceilings make the house feel huge, and because Elizabeth and her husband, Jimmy, are newlyweds, the lack of furniture creates a noticeable echo as we speak to one another. I can tell that Elizabeth has been working to turn this house into a home with the warm paint colors on the walls decorated with family photos.

I notice her long blonde hair hangs in a loose ponytail. A pair of oversized jeans and a t-shirt covers her petite frame. She and I are the same age, 28, but live two very different lives. Elizabeth owns a beautiful home with her husband Jimmy. She teaches second grade and lives in a small country town. I own a small home, am unmarried, and am working on a Ph.D. Yet, she gives me a knowing glance confirming the connection we know we already share.

õSo, Elizabeth, I know I shared with you earlier on the phone that my dissertation is centered on ritual, but will you first share with me all about your sister, Ashley. What did she look like? What was her personality type?ö Elizabeth has already expressed her anticipation to have the opportunity to talk about Ashley, and I want to make sure she gets that opportunity. I believe Elizabeth will appreciate that I want to know more about Ashley as a person before leading in with my interview questions related to ritual. Elizabeth sits down beside me and begins, õShe was a twin, slender, with a round face. She had straight blonde hair while her fraternal twin, Lauraøs, was curly. Ashley was beautiful, and definitely had more of a bubbly personality than Laura. She was funny, always playing tricks on people. She was also very artistic.ö

As Elizabeth describes her sister in glowing terms, I ponder the concept of sanctification of the deceased; often practiced by surviving family members, sanctification is the emphasizing of positive aspects. . . such that, in some cases only the positive aspects of the dead are recounted (Vernon 1970). Sanctification is practiced by survivors who are reluctant to communicate negative qualities about the deceased. I notice this also in my interviews with Mark, who spoke more harshly about his living brotherøs personal flaws than about his deceased brother. I wonder if Elizabeth and I will reach a stage in our relationship where she will feel comfortable ignoring this social constraint and share the characteristics of Ashley that were not so õperfect.ö

Elizabeth stops, her eyes dart back and forth as if she is searching for the right words to proceed.

õMaybe I will be able to give you a better description of who Ashley was later in the interviews,ö she says.

õOh, sure,ö I reply. õWell, would you mind sharing about your relationship with her prior to her death?ö

õIøll just go ahead and be candid with you. When I was fifteen I found out that she was having sex, doing drugs, and drinking at the age of thirteen. It was so hard for me because I saw the path she was following, and I was scared for her. I felt like a mother losing my baby. I was glad though that she felt like she could confide in me.ö Iøm surprised Elizabeth decides to be so candid about Ashleyøs not so perfect behavior, momentarily dispelling the theory of sanctification I had been developing.

Elizabethøs comparison to õa mother losing her babyö may be an unusual way to describe a sibling relationship but it underscores their closeness. Siblingsø worlds are often side by side, leaving their vulnerabilities well known to one another (Markowitz, 1994). Elizabeth mentions that Ashley confided her rebellious behavior with Elizabeth. Auz and Andrews (2002) note the surviving sibling could have possibly been the closest person to the deceased sibling before his or her death, thus making the grief experience enormously painful. There are often secrets shared between siblings and aspects known about each other that are not known or shared with the parents. This intimacy can make the sibling bond more intense than any other relationship, especially during the adolescent years and into young adulthood. In this sense, õmother losing a childö does not describe the dynamics between Elizabeth and Ashley for even though Elizabeth did not approve of Ashleyøs behavior, Ashley viewed Elizabeth as a confidant, rather than an authority figure.

Elizabeth continues, õOn the day she died, I picked her up from school and we went to lunch, which was not typical of us. We also went shopping, and in the car ride home, we heard all these random songs like Lynard Skynardøs *Tuesday's Gone*. Ashley said, ÷this is the song I want played at my funeral.ø I thought that was weird--sheøs 16 years old and sheøs planning her funeral? At the store, she picked out a pair of overalls she really wanted. Ashley always borrowed money from people and never paid them back. Normally, I would never buy her anything, but that day I said, ÷Iøll buy them for you.ø Thank God I did, because we ended up burying her in those overalls.ö

Elizabeth pauses and looks up in thought. õI think it was such a blessing that I was given the opportunity to spend her last day with her.ö

õI agree. Those final moments I had with Jeremy were such a blessing.ö I wonder if she would like to hear more about my brother, but as always, I rarely offer information unless someone asks. I realize now that it might have made Elizabeth feel more at ease if I had jumped in and shared some of my own story of loss.

Like Mark, Elizabeth seems to find meaning in relating the sequence of events leading up to Ashleyøs death. However in contrast to Mark, her story includes herself as an active participant. She reacts to the õweirdnessö of Ashleyøs comment about playing the Lynard Skynard song at her funeral, and presents her purchase of the overalls for Ashley as somehow spontaneous, yet in hindsight significant because Ashley was buried in them.

The interview veers in a different direction after Elizabeth probes into my relationship status, and before I know it I look down at my watch and notice it is already 10:00 p.m. I have a long drive home, and have to be up early for work in the morning. We decide to call it a night and agree to meet the following week again at her house.

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The following Wednesday I pull up to Elizabethøs house again. I believe the last interview is a great example of how easy it is to get off topic. I make a promise to myself to try to keep the interview at least on the subject of sibling grief. Elizabeth and I have known each other through a mutual friend for awhile

and I feel comfortable diving right in with the first question to try to maximize our time together, õCan you tell me more about how Ashley died, and how you found out?ö

õSure. Ashleyøs boyfriend, Aaron, came to pick her up at about 7:00 p.m. to go out, while her twin, Laura, and I were getting ready to go to a party. I remember him coming in the house and standing there while we put on our make-up. Ashley and Aaron left and Laura and I went to the party at a friendøs house. After an hour at the party, I received a call from my older sister, Mandy. She screamed hysterically, ÷Where is Ashley?ø I told her Ashley went out with Aaron. ÷Iøm freaking out! There is a bad wreck on the news, and it looks like his truck. Find them! Find them! Find them!ø she cried.ö

Elizabeth shares this story with ease, as if she has recounted it many times before. It doesnøt seem to evoke any emotion; just the facts as she remembers them.

She continues, õAt first, I was in denial. I kept saying repeatedly in my mind ÷there is no way it could be Ashley.ø Laura and I immediately left the party. We got back to the house and my mom was in the shower. We started calling Aaronøs house, the hospital; we were calling everyone we could think of to call. We finally got in touch with his brother. He said they could not find Aaron, and that his dad was going down to the site of the accident that was on the news. I called Becca, my best friend, and asked if she would take me out to the scene. Becca arrived at my house shortly after and, as we were getting ready to go, the doorbell rang. I answered it to find the police along with a chaplain standing at the door.ö

She breaks for a second and then begins to shake her head saying, õItøs interesting how differently family members act during shock. I remember sitting in the corner of the kitchen crying. Laura got angry. When my uncle died a few weeks prior to Ashleyøs death, Laura in a fit of rage pulled up all the bushes in the front yard. On that night, I looked over and she was ripping the kitchen counter tops off with her bare hands.ö

õAre you serious?ö I ask.

õDead serious; thatøs just how she dealt with trauma. My Mom kept saying ÷no it canøt be her ó get a picture. Show the police a picture.ø Aaron and Ashley died immediately at the scene.ö

Elizabethøs voice quivers as she says, õI had to call my dad, and that was hard.ö This was the first sign of emotion I witness during our interviews. I am relieved to find that I am not the only sibling who has had the horrific experience of telling my father the terrible news. I encourage her to go on.

õMy dad lived out in this little shack because after my parentøs divorce their business went bankrupt. Luckily, he talked to Ashley the night before, and told her that he loved her. That night he was out in the middle of the woods by himself. My grandmother had been in the hospital that morning to get a heart stent. When I called crying, he thought it was about my grandmother. I said, ÷no Dad, itøs Ashley and sheøs dead.ø He started screaming and what haunts me to this day is that he was by himself.ö

õOh Elizabeth, I am so sorry. I can say that I know what that is like. I was the one who had to inform my Dad over the phone that Jeremy had died. My

parents were in Ft. Lauderdale about to board a cruise ship when the hospital was finally able to contact them. I expected him to lose it and never be able to look at me the same way, but he was so calm when I told him. He and mom were able to take a flight immediately home that morning.ö

õYouøre the first person Iøve met who had to tell a parent. That was the hardest thing I have ever had to do. Nothing can prepare you for that.ö

I completely agree.

õWhat was life like for your family after Ashleyøs death?ö

õIt changed completely. In many positive ways too, not just negative ones. Positively we are all very close and very open about our feelings. On the negative side, my mom got sick with cancer, which I think was a direct affect of Ashleyøs death. It was so hard because she was very sick, but now she is doing better.ö

õIn addition, I felt like I lost two sisters because when Ashley died I also lost Laura, her twin, figuratively. Laura and I had so much in common including personalities.ö

These last, brief comments reflect Ashleyøs effort to make sense of more recent events in her family. Her reference to her motherøs cancer is striking because it suggests that she sees Ashleyøs death as the *cause*, as well as the result, of later events. Like Mark, she also feels she has õlostö her surviving sibling. This sense of secondary losses, felt over time as the death is processed, has often been observed among surviving family members (Rosenblatt, 1996).

Elizabeth continues, õI think Laura feels guilty that she is the surviving twin, and now that Ashley is gone, she needs to act out Ashleyøs rebellious lifestyle. It created this new dynamic between the siblings, especially when Laura started to exhibit the same behaviors as Ashley. Laura was a well-established gymnast. She made straight Aøs and did manage to graduate college with honors, considering what she had been through, but it has been a hard road for her. She started doing drugs, which was not like her at all. Even now, she is engaged to a man who was Ashleyøs friend while she was alive. He is probably not someone she would have chosen to marry before Ashleyøs death.ö

Like Markøs story, Elizabethøs can be analyzed from multiple perspectives, including, first, what it reveals of survivorsø lived experience. For example, Lauraøs behavior recalls Bank and Kahnøs (1982) notion of the õphantom sibling.ö They suggest that where the sibling was only a few years apart from the deceased sibling or they were twins, the phantom sibling can be created as the living sibling searches for his or her brother or sister in other people. He or she believes that the brother or sister is still living, in a figuratively sense. They look for the deceased sibling's smile, gestures, posture, or laugh in someone else, and when they find someone, that person õbecomesö his or her brother or sister (p. 283). Auz and Andrews (2002) found in some instances the surviving sibling might try to imitate and copy the behavior of the deceased sibling. This helps the survivor feel closer to the dead brother or sister. For example, if the deceased siblingøs passion was football, the surviving sibling might devote the rest of his high school career to football, in honor of his brother, when football is not the

surviving siblingøs passion. Elizabethøs account offers evidence of how the phantom sibling and imitation might show up in a surviving siblingøs response insofar as Laura adopts Ashleyøs behavior. However, viewed in narrative terms, Elizabethøs account also reflects her own effort to account for the incongruities in Lauraøs behavior which she sees as a result of survivor guilt. Before Ashley died, Laura was an õestablished gymnastö and honors graduate. Elizabeth then presents Ashleyøs death as the turning point that led to Lauraøs drug use and inappropriate choice of partner.

õThe first year the grief would overcome you out of nowhere,ö Elizabeth continues. õI was lucky I was able to cry a lot. People asked if I was angry, but I do not think I ever experienced anger. Yes, I am sad I lost her, but I have a strong faith that God has a plan for your life. She knew her plan and lived it the way she thought she should, and when she left, she was in a good place spiritually.ö Elizabeth references her spiritual faith a number of times during our meetings. People with a strong religious or spiritual faith originating before the death of a loved one may adapt to the death at a more accelerated rate than respondents who do not have a firm foundation in a religious or spiritual faith. Researchers attribute this to the cognitive process of believing in a reunion with lost loved ones in an afterlife, as well as the belief that there is a purpose in suffering (Davis et al., 1998). Later in our interviews Elizabeth references her faith again, saying õmy faith has been priceless; it has saved me.ö Nickman and Silverman (1996) note when a sibling has a firm belief in the afterlife, they can bring themselves closer the deceased sibling. They are able to sustain the relationship with this belief, and

find a grief resolution (Dull &Skokan, 1995; Smith et al., 1992). I imagine Elizabethøs strong sense of faith has helped in her grief resolution.

I take a sip of the warm coffee Elizabeth made. õHow did your family arrange the funeral?ö I ask.

õWe arranged for it to be in this century old beautiful Methodist church. Typically, the church does not allow an open casket, but my dad insisted, ÷I want everyone to see how beautiful she is until the very last second. Keep it open.ø The casket lay open, but Ashley did not look the same.ö I hope Elizabeth will expound on seeing her sister in the casket, but I am met with silence. I would imagine it to be a traumatic experience to see my sibling lying lifeless in a coffin. I agree that is not the way I would want to remember a loved one.

I break the silence, õThe memory of entering the room full of caskets still sends chills down my spine.ö

Elizabeth responds, õYes, arranging the funeral was one of the worst experiences. It made it real for me too.ö

I find it interesting that for both Elizabeth and me it was the funeral and its preparations that confirmed the siblingøs death. Could it be the act of publicly placing the body in a casket provides some sort of closure that the death has really occurred? Despite the pain and anxiety surrounding funeral preparations, Romanoff (1998) notes the performance of certain rituals serves as a powerful tool in acknowledging major change. She also reveals that, õrituals provide a vehicle for the expression and containment of strong emotions; their repetitive

and prescribed nature eases feelings of anxiety and impotence and provides structure and order at times of chaos and disorderö (p. 698).

Although the rituals surrounding the funeral solidified the death for Elizabeth and me, Romanoff (1998) notes that bereavement rituals such as the funeral are one-time events. For many families in our society, the funeral is the last ritualistic event to commemorate the loved one. He determines the ritual practice in our society is õoften inauthentic, a hollow and rigid practice, devoid of the opportunity for genuine healingö (p. 697) that can only happen over time. I appreciated the ritualistic act of the funeral as a celebration of my brotherøs life, but I do remember being disappointed knowing that was the last public ritual we would have to commemorate Jeremy. In reality, I think the healing process would be aided by enacting more public rituals after the funeral, perhaps in a way similar to another family who participated in this study, the Littles. They had a public celebration of what would have been their deceased sonøs, Cooperøs, eighteenth birthday.

Elizabeth decides to turn the tables a bit and ask me a question, õDo you ever dream about him?ö I am pleasantly surprised that Elizabeth decides to take the reins and steer the interview in a direction that she finds interesting.

õActually yes, I dream about him often, but one dream in particular stands out. In this dream my entire family was sitting in our living room chatting together as normal, and suddenly Jeremy came striding through the front door. He casually found his place, sitting on a red chair in the middle of the room. ÷Jeremy, you have to tell me what heaven is likeí ,øI tell him. ÷It is

indescribable!ø he exclaims. ÷I met Memaw (our deceased Grandmother on my fatherøs side who died in a car accident before Jeremyøs birth) and I saw Grandma again (she passed away a year before his death). I canøt wait for yaøll to get here.øö I shared this dream as a story with my family. I thought it would bring them comfort and perhaps help them in their sense-making process. My family listened eagerly to the disclosure of my dream, although my sister April expressed her envy and that she wished she could have a similar dream. Apart from this interview with Elizabeth, my family routinely shared dreams within the family but not with outsiders. In a way, dreams can be seen as a form of õdialogueö with the deceased that is culturally acceptable whereas other, more direct forms of communicating with the deceased might be considered too strange.

õWow! What an awesome dream! I am so jealous,ö Elizabeth exclaims. õI have had only one dream. Ashley came to us and I could touch her face. She said ÷donøt be sad for me. I am great, wonderful, and am doing so much work.ø That dream helped me through the grieving process.ö

õI know what you mean. To see their mannerisms, touch their face, the experience is such a blessing.ö

Elizabethøs and my dreams were similar in that they both confirmed that our loved ones were õokay.ö The fact that Elizabeth and I could share our dreams with one another presupposed a sense of intimacy. I was excited Elizabeth broached the subject.

Elizabeth glances down at her watch, and for the first time I realize how late in the evening it is. õOh, I know it is getting late,ö I say with hesitation.

õOh, no worries, I am really interested to know how your friends responded to you after the death. Many of mine didnøt know what to say, so they didnøt say anything, and that hurt. I am a very open person, and if someone wants to talk to me about it, I am open and willing to discuss it. Sometimes people did not know how to respond to me. You try to make it less awkward because that conversation will never be comfortable.ö

Surviving siblings are well-known as the õforgotten grieversö (Doka, 1989). It could also be that friends and acquaintances who are at a younger age do not have the maturity to respond in appropriate ways to a surviving sibling.

Elizabeth continues, õI had a best friend during that time. We grew up together. She just couldnøt handle it and completely dropped me as a friend. I remember that being so hard to take. The time that I needed her the most she deserted me. I donøt judge her looking back now. Who knows, at that age I may have responded in the same manner.ö

õI did have friends that reacted in the same manner. It was actually shocking who was there for me, and who shied away. Like you said though, I try not to hold it against them. We are a death denying society, and to acknowledge our pain means they would have to accept death as a reality. That is something I donøt believe people are readily able to do.ö

I perceive our conversation nearing an end, so I sneak in one last question. õDo you have any advice to give someone who has recently lost a sibling?ö

õTry to do something to commemorate your sibling, whether it is around the time of their death or not. It helps having time with each other to celebrate

that personøs life. Mandy, Laura, my Mom, and I always go to a surviving twin conference every summer to support Laura. It ends up being a great time of bonding that has been cool for us and we are able to help others who have lost a sibling.ö

She pauses in thought, õGiving back and serving others also helps because it allows you to see outside of your grief into the lives of other people. Many people have walked a much harder road than I have. It puts things in perspective. Yes, I lost my sister, but some people lose their whole families. I am blessed to still have two sisters and a brother who love each other and help each other through. Like I said, I am blessed.ö   Robinson and Mahon (1997) note this is a positive outcome of sibling loss. Often surviving siblings have an increased õawareness of or sensitivity to the experiences of othersö (p. 486). Elizabeth definitely displays this awareness. Whereas I left my last interview with Mark questioning his assertion of the benefits, I do not have the same reaction to Elizabeth. This may be because of our shared spiritual orientation. I found myself responding to the way she seemed to have reframed her life after Ashleyøs death through her reliance on her faith.

õThank you so much, Elizabeth. Talking with you, hearing your stories, and sharing some of my own has been such a pleasure.ö

õIn a way, we are sisters now, you know,ö Elizabeth concludes.

õYeah, sistersí   I love the sound of that.ö

Katrina's Story

Katrina Warner is in her early twenties, the youngest surviving sibling participant in this study, with long dark straight hair and a beautiful smile. She greets me as she walks into Starbucks for our initial meeting. Iøve known her since high school and know she lost her sister, Mary. Mary tragically died in a car accident the day after Katrina graduated from high school. She was only twenty-one years old. Out of the three surviving sibling participants, Katrinaøs loss is the newest and I anticipate how this might have an effect on the storytelling.

We catch up with small talk about what our families have been up to, and what is new in our lives. I felt comfortable asking Katrina to participate because we have known each other for a while and she knew my brother. I distinctly remember her attending Jeremyøs funeral. When I found out about her sisterøs death, I attended Maryøs funeral. I arrived about thirty minutes before the funeral started to try to speak to Katrina and her older sister, Leslie. When Katrina saw me, she literally ran to me sobbing and threw her arms around me in an embrace. She wouldnøt let go. I remember feeling a bit uneasy at the intensity of her embrace, but the memories of my own brotherøs death flooded back, as well as the urgency to talk to someone who had lost a sibling. She kept asking me, õOh Julia, how did you get through this? How will I ever get through this?ö I didnøt have an answer for her at the time; I could only give her a knowing glance.

Four years have passed since her sisterøs funeral, and I am anxious to find out how life has progressed since Maryøs death. õSo Katrina, how did you grieve for Mary?ö I begin.

I notice immediately that Katrinaøs answer to this question mostly revolves around symbolic artifacts and their role in marking the milestones of Katrinaøs life. In contrast, Mark and Elizabeth rarely mentioned any symbolic artifacts, although Elizabeth did describe the importance of the overalls they buried Ashley in.

Katrina explains, õWell, itøs a tradition in my family, that on your twenty-first birthday you receive a pair of diamond studs. My parents gave me Maryøs after she died. I got a second hole pierced into my ears so that I could wear them all the time no matter what. After about two years they started to get loose and well, one fell out one day when I was at the cemetery visiting Maryøs grave. I called my mom crying asking her to come and help me find them. I decided after that that I would have my Dad keep them for me to give them to whoever asks for my hand in marriage to put into my engagement ring.ö

I continue, õDid your relationship with Leslie change after Maryøs death?ö

õYes, I feel in a way that Leslie grieved ÷harderø than I did. She grieved for a longer period of time and was just sad. I feel like now on holidays and Maryøs birthday, Leslie has a more difficult time. I am very open and like to talk about my feelings, Leslie is more private. She wonøt tell anybody about the dayøs significance (the death anniversary) and because she is in Jackson, no one knows and she just ends up having an emotionally exhausting day. Itøs interesting

because Mary and Leslieøs personalities were on opposite ends of the spectrum, and I fit somewhere in the middle. Mary would talk to a fly, whereas Leslie was always more introverted. I think that had an effect on the way Leslie grieved.ö

I believe my prior relationship with Katrina led me to ask different questions than I asked Mark and Elizabeth simply because I already knew the background and circumstances surrounding Maryøs death. For example, I asked Mark what his relationship with the deceased was like. I skipped over these questions with Katrina because of my comfort with her and with the circumstances surrounding the death. In retrospect, I see how asking similar questions would have been beneficial for the analysis as well as for the reader who is not as acquainted with Katrina as I am.

õHow about your parents, how did they grieve?ö I ask.

õThey never openly expressed their grief to us, and in many ways I wish they would have. I know they have their hard days, but they never discuss it. I have heard that when a mother loses a child itøs like losing a part of herself. That is how I would describe my mother; she will never be the same again. She deals more with extreme emotions like bitterness and depression. My Dad is just quieter about everything. I would never want Mom to know I feel this way, it would really hurt her.ö

Katrina continues, õIøve always said that it is more draining to watch other people that you love grieve, than to grieve yourself. I appreciated that right after Maryøs death it was acceptable to openly show our emotions, but once that summer ended the openness ended as well. I think it would have been better for

me if we had continued to openly express our grief to one another because I am a very open person to begin with. One of the hardest things was trying to trust God to meet all of their needs. He created them, therefore he is going to meet their needs better than I ever could. But it was so hard watching them grieve and knowing that I couldnøt do anything for them. But there were days too where I would feel guilty because I felt totally fine. I couldnøt cry if I wanted to and I would wonder what is wrong with me. But there were other days that just the opposite occurred. I remember sharing this with my dad one night and he said just imagine if we were all at that down stage at the same time. We need to be at different stages in order to carry each other at different times. That made sense to me.ö

õYeah, it is difficult being at different places in your grief than other family members.ö

õI agree. It was just especially hard with my mom. It was so hard when I knew she was upset, but she would just shut down. When she does that it upsets me because I canøt tell for sure if she is upset about Mary or if she is upset with me. Bottom line, I know my mom is hurting and what she needs is for me to move towards her and love her and try to not take it so personally. I get hurt though, and want to put up my own walls once she puts up hers. I wish we just could have all been open with one another.ö

õHow did you make the transition to college? ö I continue.

õYeah, that was hard because I was making new friendships. One day it occurred to me that none of these people will ever know Mary. No matter how

much I describe her or talk about her, they will never get it. That was the hardest part to me. They were really supportive though and listened to me when I would talk about her.ö

õDid their support help you in any way? Even though they had never met Mary?ö

õYes. I remember I was having a really hard day and I ended up calling my mom which is usually something I would never do because I didnøt want to upset her. My mom told me to go get my roommates and tell them that I was upset and that I needed their support. I wouldnøt do it. I felt like they didnøt really want to be there for me because I was sure they could hear me crying in my room and they didnøt come in to check on me. After my mom and I hung up, my mom called one of my roommates and asked her to check on me. I remember being upset with my mom for doing that, but then relieved at the same time because I did need some support, but it hurt my pride to have to reach out for it. I also worried they would judge me if I didnøt have a good excuse for being upset. But these random things would trigger my grief and I couldnøt control it that is why I wouldnøt always reach out to my friends.ö

Katrina seems to be silencing her grief due to her perception that others are evaluating her grief. Her account exemplifies the way in which social norms are placed on survivors as to what are acceptable grief practices (Stroebe, 1994).

From this point on in the interview our conversation moves towards dreams we have had about our lost siblings. We talk about the source of comfort dreaming about our lost loved ones brings to us. I share with Katrina the dream I

also shared with Elizabeth. She told me, õI consider the dreams I have of Mary to be little kisses from heaven.ö I agree with her. After a while we decide to end this meeting and agree to meet at the same spot the following week.

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I greet Katrina as she strides into the campus Starbucks with her bubbly smile. We order our coffee and situate ourselves on the comfy couch in the corner of the shop.

She begins, õIøve been thinking about our conversation last week, and I hope the things I shared about my family, especially my mother were not too harsh. Will you use our real names in the study?ö

õOh, of course not. I will be happy to use pseudonyms for you and the family members you discuss in these interviews.ö

I can tell this has been bothering her, and try to comfort her as much as possible.

õTo be honest, my mother had an objection to my participation in your study. She told me not to air any dirty laundry about our family.ö

õI hope that is not what she thinks I am trying to do with this research.ö

õI know, and I told her that was not your purpose. But that just goes back to my initial point that she is so guarded with her feelings. But I would never want to betray her trust.ö

õI completely understand, Katrina, and have even struggled with this myself. I have included my own family in this research and it is always an ethical dilemma to decide what to include and what to leave out. It is not always peaches

and cream with a family after a death. We can all put on happy faces, but some experiences are just rough.ö

õYes, the worst comes out for sure.ö

I wish Katrina would share some of these experiences with me, but she decides to remain silent and only gives me a hint that there have been some really trying times after Maryøs death. This shows the difference between siblings and their willingness to disclose about such personal subject matter. In contrast to Katrina, Elizabeth was extremely open in the challenges she and her family faced after her sisterøs death. I believe Katrina was more guarded with her interviews in part because her mother specifically asked her not to õair our dirty laundry.ö I wonder what exactly constitutes õdirty laundryö and whether it is a reference to those internal family struggles after a death that would lead to feelings of shame or guilt. This concept can be connected to the idea that certain expressions of grief are more socially acceptable while others are not (Stroebe, 1994). It was not exactly clear what would cause Katrinaøs family to harbor feelings of shame or guilt, but I imagined they were the reason she did not want to air their õdirty laundry.ö

Before I can invite her to expound more on this, Katrina continues, õIøve been thinking about something that I wanted to ask you from a surviving siblingøs perspective.ö

õSure.ö

õDo you ever feel like you wonøt be able to marry someone that didnøt personally know Jeremy? Has that thought ever crossed your mind?ö

õYes, I think ideally I would love for my partner to have known him, but the more time that lapses the less likely I think that will happen.ö

õWell, Iøm not sure where this feeling is coming from. I have been dating a wonderful guy for a while now and in a way itøs like I need Mary to be able to give me her approval. I have always received her opinion with boyfriends in the past, and the thought of her never knowing who I will eventually marry scares me in a way.ö

õI understand that desire, and have experienced it too.ö

Marriage seems to be a common thread in Katrinaøs interview with her passage at the beginning addressing the diamonds she would like placed in a future engagement ring and now her concern that her future husband will most likely have never known Mary. I agree with Katrina because I believe it may be difficult to initially develop an intimate relationship with someone who did not personally know the deceased. I remember having that desire for a while, but with time it has dissipated as the reality of that actually being a possibility has diminished. Perhaps that fear is related to the fear of õforgettingö the lost loved one by moving forward with someone who has no memory of the lost loved one.

Katrina continues, õWell, one of the reasons I agreed to these interviews is to hopefully help someone else entering the world of sibling grief. I think a lot of people think they canøt ask God why, but I think itøs perfectly okay to ask him why. I believe when you are honest with yourself and those emotions, that draws you closer to the Lord. There was this book that came out a while ago called *The Shack* (Young, 2007). Have you read it?ö

õI have.ö

õWell, I read it after Maryøs death and so many things in that book rang true to me. The character in the book asks God some really hard questions about life and death. It just really resonated with me. My favorite was page 126. When you get a chance, you should go back and read that page. Usually on Maryøs death anniversary I will email a passage from that page to all my family members.ö

õI will have to go back and read it.ö

õYou should! It really helped me because if you remember, the man in the story is struggling with all of those questions of why his daughter had to die. And God just meets him where he is, and shows him his mercy and love. That book helped me with my own questions after Maryøs death. Questions I think we will all ask God at one point or another in our lives.ö

After our last interview I went back and reread Katrinaøs reference to page 126 of *The Shack*. In this passage, God is responding to Mackenzieøs (the main character) questions about Godøs sovereignty after the murder of his young daughter:

Mackenzie, you really donøt understand yet. You try to make sense of the world in which you live based on a very small and incomplete picture of reality. It is like looking at a parade through the tiny knothole of hurt, pain, self-centeredness, and power, and believing you are on your own and insignificant. All of these contain powerful lies. You see pain and death as ultimate evils and God as the ultimate betrayer, or perhaps, at best, as fundamentally untrustworthy. You

dictate the terms and judge my action and find me guilty. The real underlying flaw in your life Mackenzie, is that you do not think that I am good. If you knew I was good and that everythingô the means, the ends, and all the processes of individual livesô is all covered by my goodness, then while you might not always understand what I am doing, you would trust me.

While most of my interviewees hint at their search for meaning after death, Katrina is explicit about her personal struggle saying, õI think itøs okay to ask God why.ö Her process of searching for meaning was refreshing in the fact that she seems to be actively searching for it, and is not afraid to ask those hard yet significant questions.

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Mark, Elizabeth, and Katrina all provide different insights into how they view õdoing grief.ö In Markøs choice of words it can be argued that he believes in the idea of grief as õwork.ö As referenced in Chapter One, õgrief workö is a modernist view that a number of tasks must be successfully completed in order to achieve adaptation (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1991; M. Stroebe 1994). Mark becomes the agent of change, completing all the necessary steps to be õhealedö after the loss of his brother. The first sign I noticed that Mark might view grief from the modernistøs perspective was at the sibling support group when he announced, õToday, we are sharing about a common stage of grief, anger.ö It became apparent that he believed grief could be quantified into stages and it is up to the individual to successfully walk through them. He further bolsters my assertion when he speaks of the schism between himself and his brother, Trey, which, he

implies, exists because Trey has not õfound anything positive that has surfaced from Brianøs death. He just holds onto a lot of resentment and has chosen to go in another direction. To this day I do not believe that Trey has really grieved Brianøs death.ö Mark, in contrast to Brian, describes himself as õtruly being able to grieve, moving forward in his life, and being able to come out on the other side of grief.ö It is apparent that Mark places a high value on agency and working through oneøs grief in order to find the meaning for the death. And in his case, he believes he would not be as happy as he is today if it werenøt for Brianøs death.

On the other hand, Elizabeth views the tragedy and the grief as having both positive and negative effects on herself and the family, saying, õPositively we are all very close and open about our feelings. On the negative side, my mom got sick with cancer, which I think was a direct effect of Ashleyøs death.ö Elizabeth does not accuse her mother of not doing the appropriate grief work in order to offset her illness. Rather, she takes a more neutral stance relative to Mark, suggesting that the grief had detrimental physical effects on her mother but that it was something that couldnøt be avoided.

Elizabeth shares a commonality with Mark when she says she feels as though she lost her other sister, observing, õI felt like I lost two sisters because when Ashley died I also lost Laura, figuratively.ö Laura, she explains, chose a different path to demonstrate her grief. Whereas Mark does not offer an excuse for Treyøs behavior after Brianøs death, Elizabeth says she believes Laura behaved rebelliously because she felt guilty that she had lived and Ashley had died.

Elizabethøs story seems to paint Laura as more of a victim as opposed to her sister acting irresponsibly.

Compared to Mark, Elizabeth demonstrates more of a postmodernist view õsearching for an appreciative understanding of grief in all its varietiesö (Stroebe et al. 1996, p. 42). Her stance connotes more passivity than Markøs when she describes grief as something that õwould overcome you out of nowhereö and sometimes still washes over her. She finds comfort in believing in something higher than herself and that she will see Ashley again one day in heaven. Elizabeth also sees the value in commemorating her loved one by participating in the ritual of the twinsø conference. Her family goes to the conference every year in order to remember Ashley. Elizabeth does not demonstrate a belief in the õbreaking-bonds hypothesisö outlined in the modernist approach, due in part to her commitment to keep Ashleyøs memory alive by enacting rituals.

Like Mark, Katrinaøs interview describes a difference in the styles of grief between her and her surviving sister, Leslie. õI am very open and like to talk about my feelings, [but] Leslie is more private.ö She attributes this to a difference in personalities. õLeslie was always more introverted. I think that had an effect on the way Leslie grieved.ö Unlike Mark though, Katrina is not sure if there is a correct or incorrect way to grieve. She notes that her parents õnever openly expressed their grief to usö in an effort to shield the surviving children, but expresses her wish that they had because it would have helped her in her own grief. She openly shares that sometimes she feels guilty for õnot grieving enoughö or having really happy days when the rest of her family is sad. She

wonders if she is doing grief correctly. It becomes evident that Katrina believes there is a right versus wrong way to grieve, but she does not have a grasp on what constitutes the right versus wrong way. She is actively searching for the answers and often feels perplexed exclaiming, õI just wish we could have all been open with one another.ö

I learned that Mark leads surviving sibling support groups while Elizabeth attends surviving twin conferences every year. An interesting commonality lies in the very public context Mark and Elizabeth utilize for grieving as opposed to Katrinaøs private conversations with family and friends. Mark and Elizabeth have had the opportunity to õpracticeö their stories and this may have had an effect on the storiesø authenticity. In my interview with Elizabeth I noted, õElizabeth shares this story with ease, as if she has recounted it many times before. It doesnøt seem to evoke any emotion; just the facts as she remembers them.ö Mark explains the stages of grief and working through them with such ease I could tell he was very familiar with the subject matter. I find it important to note the differences between the public versus private platforms of grief for Mark, Elizabeth, and Katrina.

CHAPTER FIVE

PARENTSøPERSPECTIVES

Barbara's Story

I walk into Starbucks with a twinge of nervousness that usually accompanies meeting someone new, specifically someone participating in my study. Barbara seemed uneasy on the phone when we organized the place and time to meet. Will she be open to sharing about the loss of her son, or will the experience be like pulling teeth for her and for me?

I notice Barbara instantly; she looks exactly the way she described herself to me on the phone. She has a petite frame; her brown hair is cut short, close to her face. She is in her mid-sixties, dressed in a comfortable pair of slacks and turtleneck. I am struck by her natural beauty.

õYou must be Julia,ö she says softly with a noticeably southern accent.

õYes, Maøam,ö I reply.

We find a nearby booth and begin a discussion that will lead to many more, and eventually a visit to Barbaraøs home.

We enjoy small talk about the weather before delving into the interview.

õLet me start by asking about your childrení ö

õMy husband and I have two sons, Tyler and Jordan. Jordan was our younger son who died at the age of thirty. He graduated from Millsaps University

with a degree in Psychology, and he was living and working in Fort Collins, Colorado. He was very smart.ö

Barbara continues, õHe decided he would not like to pursue a career in Psychology and instead became very interested in working outdoors. He loved nature and wildlife, and so Colorado was a perfect fit for him. He worked at Yellowstone National Park for a while, and then at some ski resort, and ended up working for a beverage distributor in Fort Collins. He was always at loose ends as to what to do career wise. The cards just didnøt ever seem to fall together for him.ö

I find it interesting that she does not give me any details about her living son, Tyler. I hope to learn more about him later in the interview but for now I encourage her to continue.

õHe was involved with a serious girlfriend and they had plans to eventually marry. But something happened, he made a terrible decision one night betraying his girlfriend and he never forgave himself for it. I think it was something he could have overcome with the proper counseling, but knowing his personality, it was just something he could not get over on his own. Lonnie, my husband, and I knew he was depressed, and we tried to get him back on the right track, but we werenøt there with himí ö

Her voice trails off and tears begin to form in her eyes. I am reluctant to ask directly about the nature of the õbetrayalö she has mentioned. Iøm not sure how to proceed here. I notice she is visibly upset, so I try to comfort her and let

her know she should take all the time she needs before trying to speak further. The inflection of her voice tells me she feels guilty for not being there for Tyler.

õWhen I really began to worry about him, I had a gut reaction that I needed to go out to Colorado to be with him, even though Lonnie and I were in constant contact with him. But I was teaching sixth grade at the time, and our school was about to go under its five year review by the state board. I was in charge of that, and being the person I am, I did not feel like I could just up and leave everybody during that time. In retrospect, thatøs exactly what I should have done, although it probably would not have changed the outcome.ö

Barbaraøs account to this point includes several elements that have been said to characterize the experience of bereaved family members (Davis et al., 1998). In particular, her story shows that she assumes a degree of personal responsibility for the death while also, attributing it to aspects of the õlifestyle or behaviors of the deceased that make the death more understandableö (Davis et al., 1998, p. 562). She begins her story by pointing out Jordanøs academic gifts and accomplishments: õhe was very intelligent.ö However, she observes that õthe cards just didnøt ever seem to fall together for him,ö suggesting that chance or bad luck played a role in the outcome of events. Then as the story unfolds she identifies what seems to be a precipitating event, a õterrible decisionö leading to a betrayal for which he never forgave himself. In emphasizing his remorse, Barbara is also emphasizing Jordanøs decency, valorizating the deceased (Bowlby-West, 1983) in a way that I heard from other participants. Taken as a whole, her explanation attempts to õmakes senseö of Jordanøs death by framing it as the

result of a series of connected events. She also feels guilt for not physically being there with Jordan, yet she weighs this against her understanding that he was an adult and nothing she could do would õchange the outcome.ö

Barbara continues, õI called a minister and asked him to contact Jordan. He did, but Jordan never called him back. Lonnie and I also knew that he had gone to see a psychiatrist and was given medication, but that it didnøt work. No one had seen or spoken to Jordan for several days, so we put out a missing personøs report, and a couple days later, the police knocked on our door at 3:15 in the morning. Jordan took his life on March 31st, 2001. We called Tyler at around 6:00 that morning, and he immediately burst into tears. He was living in Memphis at the time, and he knew that Jordan was missing and that something horrible must have happened. Jordan left us a thirty-page hand written letter that covered his entire life: his relationship with us, his relationship with God, and where he thought he would go after death. It was very philosophical.ö

I was unaware that Jordan died by suicide before this interview. I knew the story was headed this direction as Barbara described the events leading up to the suicide. I worry about my reaction to her disclosure. This is the first time I have broached suicide in an interview and hope I respond in a manner that puts her at ease. I feel sympathetic for Barbaraøs loss, but also appreciate that new insight will be given by her story of loss by suicide. For example, as Barbara shares, it occurs to me that a suicide note serves as a very unique artifact, unlike other objects cherished by survivors. This artifact was calculated and left by the deceased for a purpose. I wonder if she reads the letter often. Does it make her

angry? Is she happy that Jordan left it for her and Lonnie? Thankfully, she volunteers some of this information without me having to ask.

õI have reread the letter over the years because each time I read it, I gain a different perspective on how he was thinking and feeling.ö

She continues, õIt wasnøt just the note we discovered, but also the fact that he was actively participating in a suicide website. That is a website where people contemplating suicide can enter a virtual community with others harboring the same thoughts. They share their plans, how to do it, and encourage one another. Green and I were able to print off all of Jordanøs communication through the website, and that was helpful in a lot of ways because we were able to really see what was happening in his mind from the time he was active on the site from October through March.ö

õWow,ö I respond. õDid you have any animosity towards the creators of this website?ö

õYes and no. Yes, because I think it is tragic that people would encourage one another to carry out a suicide, but Jordan chose to become a member and engage in that site. There is no way you can set restrictions on those things.ö

I am surprised by her response. I donøt believe I would be as understanding. I could easily see how those who lose someone to suicide could look to websites like these as a place to direct blame or anger. Barbara interrupts my thoughts.

õBut I have to tell you something positive that came out of that ordeal. One night when we were looking through his profile on the site, an instant

message popped up on the screen, ÷Hey Jordan is that you, what are you doing?ø Lonnie replied, ÷This is not Jordan, this is Jordanøs dad, you must not know about Jordan.ø She messaged back, ÷He didnøt, did he?ø Lonnie wrote her, ÷Yes, he did.ø This was a young girl in high school. She lived in Memphis and she and Jordan met on this website. She didnøt know anything except his first name. She didnøt know how old he was or have a picture of him and he really didnøt know anything about her, but he had encouraged her to get treatment for depression. Basically she said it was because of his advice that she had not taken her life. She and I email regularly to this day. She went on to finish high school, college, and now has a steady job. She still continues to struggle with depression and is on medication and is trying her very best to deal with it. Her story helped Lonnie and I immensely in seeing something positive out of something that was so awful. Jordan would have been a wonderful psychologist or psychiatrist; he could always help other people. He always gave his friends good advice, but when it came to himselfí well you know.ö

That Barbara and her husband were able to find comfort by visiting a site that may have been an encouraging factor in Jordanøs death speaks directly to the idea that survivors search for meaning in mourning (Neimeyer, et. al, 2002). In particular, meaning as sense-making is defined as a personøs ability to fit a traumatic event into his or her conception of how the world should work. Barbaraøs sense-making process is apparent when she admits how the girløs story õhelped Lonnie and I immensely in seeing something positive out of something that was so awful.ö Most people in western cultures believe that õthe momentous

events in their lives are controllable, comprehensible, and nonrandomí here the emphasis is on perceiving oneøs social environment as predictable, ordered and benign (if not benevolent)ö (Davis et al., 1998, p. 563). But when a tragedy occurs, survivors are left with the difficult task of finding meaning and often do so through the process of making sense or finding some benefit from the tragedy. Barbara demonstrates this process when she makes sense of Jordanøs participation in the morbid website as having the end result of saving a girløs life. As in her earlier story of the events surrounding Jordanøs death, Barbara was able to organize this experience õin narrative form, to construct accounts that make sense of the troubling transitionsí by fitting them into a meaningful plot structureö (Neimeyer et al., 2002, 239).

In addition, many of the parents I interviewed said it touched them immensely when someone shared a story of their lost child that posed him or her in a positive light. They held on to those stories and experiences, because it gave them a sense of pride and joy knowing that a childøs goodness has made a lasting impression on others. What makes this experience so significant for Barbara is the personal testimony by Jordanøs online friend reflecting Jordanøs character and its impact, and then the opportunity for Barbara to continue correspondence with someone who had been touched by Jordanøs life.

Shortly after this conversation, Barbara has to leave to run errands. I leave this initial interview thinking about death by suicide and the extra effort survivors must exert in the search for meaning. Iøm also curious about suicide and the stigma associated with it. Communication after death is difficult in any case, but I

wonder if Barbara experienced a negative response by members of the community. Another topic of interest is the role a suicide note plays in bereavement. Who does she allow to read it, if anyone? I jot down my thoughts to continue them in one of our future meetings. We set up a time to meet again, next, at her house.

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Barbara opens the front door with a smile across her face. õHi Julia, Iøm so glad you were able to come over.ö

õThank you so much for inviting me to your home,ö I respond.

õI thought we could chat in the living room, but first let me show you around.ö

õThat sounds wonderful.ö

Barbara and Lonnieøs home is nestled into the garden district in our small town. Most of these homes are older; probably built in the 1940øs and this home is no exception. The cherry hard wood floors give the home a warm feel as we make our way from the foyer to the living room. In the living room, I notice a formal floral couch with two red chairs on either side. The wall paper on the walls is a bit outdated and continues the floral theme.

õFeel free to have a seat wherever you like,ö she instructs me. õCan I get you some coffee or tea?ö

öNo, Maøam, thank you,ö I reply. õWill Mr. Lonnie be joining us today?ö I ask.

õOh, no, he has run out to the hardware store. I think deep down he does not quite know what to say and is somewhat intimidated by this whole process,ö she admits.

õI completely understand, and definitely do not want to put him in an uncomfortable position.ö

She takes a seat next to me. õWhere should we start today?ö she asks.

õWell, I was hoping you might be able to share with me how you personally choose to memorialize Jordan. Do you look at old photographs, journal, or visit his gravesite?ö

õOh, that question I can easily answer. Would you like to come with me? It would probably be easier just to show you.ö

I follow her from the living room down the hallway. As we make our way, I notice the family photographs hanging on the walls in the hallway. Pictures of what I assume to be her wedding day, her parents, Lonnieøs parents, and the two boys at different stages in their lives. I wish I could stop and hear the stories behind all of these pictures, but Barbara seems to be on a mission to show me something.

We enter the last bedroom on the left, and it looks like a typical guest bedroom. There are no indicators that would designate this space as a õboyøsö room. It is painted pale yellow with an antique bedroom set decorated with a white comforter. At the foot of the bed lies a large trunk.

õThis was Jordanøs room when he lived here, as you can see I have converted it into a guest bedroom.ö She points to a trunk lying at the foot of the

bed. õI actually store everything I kept of Jordanøs in this trunk. On those days when I am really missing him and want to feel closer to him, I will come in here and go through the trunk. Would you like to see some of the little things I have saved?ö She asks.

We both kneel down beside the trunk. The first item she lifts out is in the shape of a small hand cut out of cardboard and decorated as a turkey. õJordan made this for me in the 1st grade. He was so proud of it,ö she says giggling.

õHow precious,ö I respond. õWhere did he go to school?ö

õHe went to Lexington Elementary and finished out at Neville High School. He had a great group of friends here.ö I see the importance of asking her questions about each artifact, both to put her at ease and to elicit details surrounding Jordanøs life. Barbara lifts out a babyøs gown. õWe had him christened in this. It seems like yesterday Lonnie and I were getting him dressed and taking him to church.ö She starts to laugh, õHe was always getting into trouble at church, talking, and cutting up. One time the pastor called him out by name in the middle of the service. He straightened up after that!ö

õI bet he did!ö I laugh along with her.

The next few items are handmade Christmas ornaments. õChristmas was always his favorite time of the year.ö

Barbara reaches in the trunk and lifts a large stack of cards. õThese are all the condolence cards we received. Sometimes I will read them. It makes me feel better to know how much Jordan was loved by family and friends in our community. You know, I have other friends who have lost a child to suicide and

they have had to deal with the stigma that usually accompanies death by suicide, but I can honestly say I have not felt that judgment by anyone in our community.ö I show my surprise.

õI know; it really speaks highly of the people who live here. They offered Lonnie and me nothing but compassion and grace after Jordanøs death; we are blessed to have those kinds of friends.ö

õYes, that is a blessing.ö

õWell, I wonøt read all of these to you, but that is something I do when I want to feel better.ö

She takes out an old annual and begins flipping through the pages. õYou know, I feel really badly for Tyler, our other son, when something happens to us. Maybe he will be married by the time we pass away, but what if he is not? Heøs forty years old now, and about to turn forty-one. I worry about him having to go through all of this stuff by himself. I know this from having two siblings; itøs easier if you have siblings to do that with because you have all those shared memories. It grieves me that Tyler will be responsible for all of the family pictures, for this trunk that at this point is holding almost all of Jordanøs memory. What will he do with this? What will be left of Jordan? I would like to think he will take it and keep it, but if he never has children it may not get passed on. Can you relate to that?ö

I am caught off guard by Barbaraøs question. I have not thought about the preservation of Jeremyøs things because I will ultimately decide with my sister how to distribute his belongings. Her comment affords me the opportunity to see

some of the fears that my own parents may be experiencing. After her comments, I want to open up a dialogue with my parents to make sure that their wishes are made known as to what they would like us to hang on to and pass down from generation to generation in an effort to keep Jeremyøs memory alive. They may just be waiting like Barbara for my sister or me to ask. It makes sense that she would be concerned about the preservation of Jordanøs memory given the importance of physical artifacts in maintaining bonds with deceased (Gentry et al., 1995; Karney, 2006; Romanoff & Ternzio, 1998).

õLike this for example, a written assignment for class in high school that reads ÷Although I have only known her for 15 years my mother has been the biggest influence my whole life.øö Barbara chuckles and goes on, õThe paper goes on to explain how much he appreciates all that I do for him. In reality, Tyler will probably not keep this, or even know how special it was to me.ö

The relationship with a deceased loved one clearly puts the deceasedøs possessions in sacred status (Gentry et al, 1995; Carney, 2006). Artifacts receive this status in part because they aid in the continuation of a relationship with the deceased (Romanoff and Ternzio, 1998). Barbara demonstrates how artifacts can be extremely comforting in the present, but in reality can invoke future losses when she considers õWhat will Tyler do with all of this? What will be left of Jordan?ö In contrast, she identified earlier that the artifacts (condolence cards) serve as a ritual for her to revise her interpretation of the death in a positive light reminding her how much õJordan was loved by family and friends.ö Barbara demonstrates the important role artifacts can serve in sense-making after loss, as

well as the continued sense of loss they have the potential to create.

Barbara continues, õLooking back now, I feel guilty because for I donøt know how long after Jordanøs death, I didnøt even think about Tyler. He didnøt enter my mind at all during the day, I could only think about Jordan.ö

I listen to Barbara amazed by her candidness. I wonder if my parents were unable to think about my sister and me after Jeremyøs death. Did Tyler sense his motherøs distance after Jordanøs death? Barbara demonstrates an idealization of the deceased child (Bowlby-West, 1983) that may create a sense of competition for affection and attention from parents among the surviving siblings. It seems as though Barbara is using Tyler to magnify the feelings of loss she carries for Jordan. It occurs to me that parents may take one of two routes. Either they idealize the lost child, creating an unrealistic competition between the living and deceased siblings, or they focus all of their attention and energy onto the surviving children. I try not to let my internal thoughts show on my face as Barbara is sharing. I am just now starting to feel that we have crossed a boundary and she is opening up more to me.

õYou know what I think about quite a lot?ö she asks me as she begins to place the objects carefully back in the box, õthe fact that I will never have any grandchildren. I mean Tyler is forty and has hinted that he does not wish to marry or ever have children, and well with Jordan, you know it is just hard.ö Secondary losses always accompany a death, but this was one I did not consider until Barbara brought it to my attention. I think about the joy my nieces have brought back into my family after Jeremyøs death. Barbaraøs realization that she will not

have grandchildren is just one of the many secondary losses that will occur over her lifetime and exemplifies Rosenblattøs (1996) point that all that is lost is not concentrated at the time of loss. õThere is, instead, a sequence, perhaps extending over oneøs lifetime, of new losses or new realizations of lossö (50). She not only has to grieve the loss of a son, but also the loss of her projected narrative that included Tylerøs marriage and future grandchildren. As Neimeyer et al., (2002) explain, õmajor losses undercut our efforts to maintain a coherent self-narrative as the significant others on whom our life stories depend are removed, prompting substantial revisions of our daily and long-range goals if our lives are once again to achieve a measure of predictability and directionö (p. 239). Barbara openly shares with me her struggle to re-story her life after the death and the secondary losses that accompany it.

I noticed she does not keep the suicide note in the trunk of artifacts. This may bolster the argument that a suicide note is not an ordinary artifact, and that it is placed in a different category completely (Wertheimer, 1991). Barbara was comfortable showing me most of Jordanøs artifacts that she cherishes, but she did not offer to show me the note she had mentioned in prior interviews. Suicide notes are common, and are usually discovered by a surviving family member (Wertheimer, 1991). They can have a significant impact on the survivorøs reactions to the death. Usually, the note will serve a crucial role in the survivorøs attempt to try to find a reason for the suicide. Survivors of suicide are warned that the notes will probably not provide the definitive answers they are looking for, but can be comforting nonetheless (Wertheimer, 1991). Regardless, these

notes serve as final messages, and usually receive õsacredö status by the survivors. In the case where the note was harsh in tone or blameful toward the survivor, it can be extremely harmful in his or her recovery. These survivors often carry more remorse for the death for a longer period of time as opposed to those who received a note that does not issue blame. Also, if survivors do not find a suicide note, they often report having a difficult time accepting that the death was in fact a suicide. They cannot accept that the loved one would leave without saying good-bye (Wertheimer, 1991). Barbara shared with me the comfort she finds in reading Jordanøs note.

She starts to look a bit tired, and I take the hint and decide that is probably enough for one day. We decide to meet one more time the following week for lunch.

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I sit down at the quaint sandwich shop to wait for Barbara to arrive. Today is the final interview I will have with her, and I am nostalgic of the time we have been able to spend with one another. She has shared more with me than I initially expected. Today I want to delve into the types of ritualistic events she used during her grieving process. I hope she is open to discussing these with me, she has been candid in the past interviews, and I am excited to see how today unfolds.

õHi Mrs. Barbara,ö I stand and we embrace. I think back to my first experience with her and how much our relationship has progressed from then to now. The waiter comes and takes our drink orders, and I decide to capitalize on

this time I have with her by jumping right into the first question, õHow did you incorporate ritual into your grieving process?ö

õWe actually did quite a few things. Neither Lonnie nor I feel close to Jordan at the cemetery. Instead, because Jordan loved Colorado and the outdoors, we bought a condo not too far from where he was living. Being in a place that he loved and enjoyed has been therapeutic for me. He loved to go mountain climbing, snow skiing, and we do all of those things when we are up there. I just feel him there.ö

She continues, õAnother thing we did immediately after Jordanøs death is join the Compassionate Friends support group for parents who have lost children. That was so helpful to be around other parents struggling too, and it wasnøt too long after that your parents arrived.ö

Here is our connection, and probably the main reason she is willing to participate in my study. My parents share a special bond with Barbara and Lonnie and it is one that I cannot understand: the loss of a child.

õLonnie and I also go out to the University every semester and speak to the ÷Death and Dyingø class about our experience losing a son to suicide. It has been very rewarding and helpful to us because I could see how sharing my story might help someone else who is struggling. You just never know what people are going through until you share your experiences and give them a chance to share theirs. It is a really powerful experience.ö

I listen in amazement as Barbara continues to explain her experience starting a support group especially designed for survivors of suicide, and how that

gave those who felt stigmatized a platform to share their grief. õWhen you have a suicide you feel so alone because there are not as many people who can relate to losing someone to suicide. Suicide is still a mystery and nobody wants to think about someone doing that. So it makes it a little more difficult for the survivor to be able to openly share about the loss. This group gives them the space to do just that. Lonnie and I ran that support group for a number of years and then stepped down to let others lead. I believe it is still going strong today.ö

Barbaraøs examples of speaking to the Death and Dying class and running a survivor support group seem at first to be unusual examples of ritual. Yet they have a public storytelling element in common. Storytelling often helps the teller to make sense of things, cope with the loss, and to find a new normal in his or her world (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005; Nadeau, 1998; Sedney et al., 1994). Through storytelling in selective groups like the suicide support group, Barbara can be seen as participating in what Turner (1969) identified as õcommunitas.ö Communitas is defined as a facet of õsociety as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated communion of equal individualsö (1969, p. 96). Participants in communitas share a sacred bond, and in this case Barbara has created communitas with other suicide survivors. Communitas can serve to õdefine reality set apart from the flow of everyday life. By distinguishing a time and space outside the boundaries of everyday interaction,ö such communal events as the support group attempt to intensify experience, õcreating a profound feeling of interrelatedness and mutual understandingö (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004, p. 521).

Barbara continues, õBut I have to tell you a story about an act that touched Lonnie and I tremendously after Jordanøs death.ö

õAbout one week after Jordan died we received a book with a letter in the mail. It was from a woman who lives about a hundred miles away. I actually knew her sister when we attended university together. I didnøt know her personally, but I knew she and her husband lost their seventeen year-old son maybe five years prior. The book was titled, ÷My Son, My Son,ø by Iris Bolt, a psychologist. That book helped me more than anything, and so now when I hear someone around the area has lost a child, whether I know them or not, Lonnie and I will send them this book. Her simple act changed my life, and I hope to do the same for someone else on down the line.ö

õDo you ever hear from any of people who receive a book from you?ö

õNo, we have not, but then again, I never contacted the people who sent us the book. Hopefully our recipients will continue to pass the favor on to other parents who will lose a child in the future, you know like a chain effect.ö

My mom remembers receiving the book from Barbara and Lonnie right after my brotherøs death. She never responded to the kind gesture, but has made it a point to send a similar book to new grieving parents. Although Barbara acknowledges that it is not always easy, she considers it her õministryö and believes she receives so much by helping others. Davis et al. (1998) notes õresearch on parental bereavement indicates that the search for significance is central to the process of readjustment after a childøs death and that parents who are able to find meaning through becoming stronger or more compassionate

people, accepting human finitude, or deepening their spirituality cope better with the lossö (p. 246). I think Barbara does a wonderful job illustrating this point with her ritual of sending new grieving parents the book and I decide to tell her how I feel.

õMrs. Green, I am truly honored to include your story in my dissertation.ö

She takes my hand and places it in hers, õYou are truly a beautiful young woman. I donøt have a daughter so I can say that to you,ö she tells me with a wink.

Barbara has opened my eyes to new realizations of a motherøs experience losing a child and in some ways complicated my understandings of parental loss. One example is her confession that she rarely thought about Tyler after Jordanøs death. My own mother never mentioned being so preoccupied with grief for Jeremy that she could not think about my sister and me. Barbara also shared with me the unique challenges survivors of suicide must face, as well as the extreme importance she placed on the artifacts she chose to keep in Jordanøs memory. She created awareness in how I preserve my own brotherøs artifacts in an effort to honor my parentsø wishes. Many of these are revelations I could not have gleaned from simply observing my own mother.

Paul's Story

The week after I attended the Birthday party for Cooper Little, I walk into the CPA firm where Paul Little, his father, works. He has agreed to meet with me at his office over his lunch break. I immediately see him standing next to the receptionistøs desk waiting for me.

õHi Julia, itøs good to see you again.ö

He leads me down a long hallway and I notice people in their offices either on the phone or working on their computers. I forgot it is the middle of tax season. It must be quite a sacrifice for Paul to meet with me again during this time. We take a right into the last office off of the hallway. I notice his office is quite a bit larger than the others and I assume this is his CPA firm. His office is pristine, everything has its place. I notice a framed picture of him and Vickie and their three children sitting on his desk. We sit at a small round table situated in the corner of his office. I take out my digital recorder and the interview begins.

õI want to begin by telling you what an honor it was to be invited to Cooperøs birthday party and I was so touched by all of the stories his friends shared with you and Vickie.ö

õIt was special wasnøt it? Vickie and I had been dreading that day for a while and we thought you know it is going to be hard regardless, so we might as well not ignore it and spend it with Cooperøs friends before they leave for college and we are not able to see them as much.ö

õAnd the concept to donate eighteen dollars to his charity, how did that idea originate?ö

õWell, Vickie and I wanted the kids to feel like they were contributing something and ÷helpingø us in a way, because we knew they sort of felt helpless. So, we thought if they could bring eighteen dollars for the foundation, it would give them purpose, and for a teenager we thought that amount wasnøt too much to ask for. They seemed to really appreciate being able to ÷doø something in

Cooperøs memory. . . Those kids blessed our socks off, Vickie and I went to bed that night and just looked at each other and said, ÷we are so blessed.ø It was a wonderful way to celebrate Cooper and helped us get through what we had anticipated as an excruciatingly painful day. Before we knew it, the day was over and we didnøt want it to be over! It was just so special, and we felt so loved.ö

õDo you think you will try to make Cooperøs birthday party an annual event?ö

õI would love that, but I doubt it. It is probably not feasible, all of those kids will be moving off this summer.ö

õYea, that is what happened with Jeremyøs friends.ö

A comparison of the Littlesø birthday party for Cooper with Barbaraøs use of the trunk and its artifacts illustrates the distinction between private and public ritual. Unlike Barbaraøs extremely private ritual of visiting her trunk and artifacts, the Littles chose a very public way to commemorate Cooper. The public nature of the Littlesø ritual seems to offer unique benefits in that they refuse to accept the funeral as the last public ritual event to honor Cooper. The birthday party shows how a family ritual centered on the past can be a creative act of õre-memberingö which can be extremely helpful to a grieving family (Attig, 1996; Grimes, 2000; Imber-Black, 1991; Vickio, 1999). In a general sense, the public performance of a ritual can õfacilitate the preservation of social order and provide ways to comprehend the complex and contradictory aspects of human existenceí the distinguishing characteristics of rituals, and their power, are contained in the use of symbols within a performance frameworkö (Romanoff &

Ternzio, 1998, p. 698). According to Bolton and camp (1987), our culture has seen a decline in public rituals and this has been attributed to more instances of complicated grief.

Paul decides to take this interview in a different direction informing me, õIøve actually been looking forward to talking with you one-on-one again. We have been struggling with our daughter, Sarah, and I was hoping to get your perspective on being a surviving sibling. She has just really had some issues after Cooperøs death, and to be honest we are really not sure how to relate to her.ö

Iøm worried about where he is going with this. I know Sarah is about to be a junior in high school. She is not quite eighteen years old so I did not ask to interview her, but I donøt believe, due to her fragile nature, that even if she was eighteen she or her parents would have agreed for her to participate in my study.

Paul pauses and waits for my response, õWell, I really canøt speak for Sarah, but I can tell you my response to my brotherøs death. When Jeremy died, I felt lost and scared. For my entire life, my parents held our family together, and I watched with horror as his death devastated them. When you are that young, you still rely on your parents for stability in your life. When I felt like that was in jeopardy, I started to panic. I donøt know if this is what Sarah is experiencing . . . And I think I should point out here that I am not a trained grief counselor. It might help for her to speak to a certified counselor.ö

öWe have her in counseling, but she just does not seem to be making much progress. She is extremely needy, I mean to the point where she does not

want to be in the house alone. And she has become extremely dependent on Vickie.ö

õI can tell you that I became very dependent on my parents. My sister had her husband to confide in, and it seems like Christopher has the same kind of support from his wife, but I did not have a spouse. My parents were all I had and to this day I am very attached to them. I am also very protective of them.ö I hope I havenøt overstepped my boundaries. I canøt speak for Sarah, but I believe she probably has some of the same feelings

õThat really helps me try to make sense of it all, and to have more patience with her. Itøs true, when you lose one child you cling even harder to the remaining children. Maybe it is just as much a problem with Vickie and me as it is with Sarah.ö Paul continues to describe how Sarah has lost her zeal for life and is now even considering not going to college. I share with him my experience of moving away for graduate school and then returning two weeks later in an effort to demonstrate how some surviving siblings need extra time to adjust to the loss. I know I did.

I continue our conversation talking about my experiences studying abroad immediately after Jeremyøs death and how helpful it was for me to retreat from my grieving family for a summer. Paul expresses his interest in encouraging Sarah to do something similar. I start to feel awkward about where this conversation is headed because I do not feel comfortable giving advice about Sarah, so I ask, õHow do you personally choose to memorialize Cooper?ö

õI donøt know if I really do the best job of openly memorializing him. I actually wish I could be more open about it with my children. Vickie and I will talk about Cooper, but I donøt talk about him to the kids. I just donøt want to upset them any further.ö

õSo, you all do not mention him.ö

õNo, and I really feel responsible for that. I think if I had done a better job of openly encouraging communication, then maybe Sarah would not be struggling the way she is. Itøs not that I donøt miss him and want to talk about him, I just donøt want to upset the kids.ö

õI remember sitting around the dinner table, and my Dad getting emotional. It did make me feel uncomfortable a bit at first, but he said from the beginning, ÷look, this hurts, and Iøm going to get emotional about it and everyone just has to be okay with that.ø Even though it was uncomfortable, his example showed us it was okay to openly grieve for Jeremy.ö

Paul and I repeatedly use the term õopenö when referring to communication and later correlate õopenö with the idea of õhealthyö grieving. From a psychological perspective, õopen communicationö is usually assumed to be (Bowlby-West, 1983), but as exemplified in our discussion it can set up certain expectations for õdoing grief rightö that can ultimately lead to Pauløs sense of failure as a grief role model.

Paul continues, õMaybe I can start doing that more often. I think everyone keeps mum about it because nobody wants to upset anyone else, and honestly there are a lot of times I just donøt feel like talking about it. I think right after it happened I

was able to just throw myself into work and that gave me a bit of a distraction. How healthy that was for my family, well I donøt know.ö Bowlby-West (1983) identifies õfamily secretsö as a common occurrence within a grieving family system. The family does not openly communicate about the loss to one another and this silence enacts an understood õfamily secretö that is kept by all members. They just donøt talk about it. Families are encouraged to openly communicate loss. The more open they are with one another about their grief experiences, the greater their chances of adaptation (Bowen, 1991).

Yet this interpretation is not shared by all. For example, Martin and Doka (2000) emphasize that even though a person is not openly discussing grief, he or she is not necessarily grieving inappropriately. They identify these types of grievers as õmasculineö grievers who õconvert most of their grief energy into the cognitive domain. Goal oriented activity is usually the behavioral expression of the masculine experienceö (Martin, Doka, 1999, 135). Later (2000) Martin and Doka renamed the category õinstrumental grievers.ö They argue that it can be detrimental if an instrumental griever quits her or his job and withdraws from previously enjoyed activities. Work or activities give a person a break from constantly focusing on his or her loss. From their perspective, Pauløs focus on his work is a completely healthy step.

I continue, õIf Iøve learned anything through this experience, it is that everyone expresses their grief differently. And just because someone is not openly communicating does not mean he or she is not grieving appropriately. I think that was one of the main things within my family. We each had an opinion

on whether each family member was grieving correctly. In reality, we all had to do it in our own time and in our own individual ways.ö

õYeah, I can definitely see that happening with us. I think Christopher is more like me, in that he doesnøt have to express his feelings. Vickie has always been good at communicating her feelings. But even she has found a different outlet with the Griefshare program.ö The Griefshare is a grief support group sponsored by the First Baptist Church of West Monroe. It is similar to the Compassionate Friends support group I mentioned earlier, but it is available for all grieving persons, not just parents.

I steer the conversation back to my original question, asking õso do you look at pictures of Cooper or visit the gravesite?ö

õYeah, sometimes I will go out to the gravesite, not as often as I did early on. I guess I just donøt do that much to actively commemorate him. His memory just hits me out of the blue sometimes. For example, when a particular song comes on the radio or someone says something that Cooper would have probably said. Most of the time it is unsolicited, and I appreciate that. It makes me feel as if he is still present with me. I donøt know if it will always be that way, but I hope so. I actually fear the day that I would have to go out and actively seek his memory.ö

Here, Paul seems to contrast õactive commemorationö with an õout of the blueö experience of remembering. It is interesting that he would view these in opposition to each other or mutually exclusive. His comment raises questions for me about how is it that we as survivors assess how we commemorate. I wonder,

too, how many other survivors share Pauløs view and reject the ritualistic processes because they prefer the spontaneity of remembrance. I can recall having moments like that myself, and every now and then something will happen that will remind me of Jeremy, but I also see the importance of actively commemorating Jeremy in some formal way. Maybe I feel this way because I want to make sure others will join me in commemorating him. I believe one of the biggest fears a survivor faces is that their loved one will be forgotten. If I donøt commemorate Jeremy in an õactiveö or õpublicö way, then I risk that happening.

õSo what is your role in the Cooper Little foundation?ö I ask.

õTo be honest, that is more Vickieøs baby. I handle the monetary aspects of the foundation, but as far as the everyday workings, Vickie is completely in charge. I think she enjoys that. In my eyes, the foundation is to her what work has become for me. Something to throw your energy into and itøs something that you enjoy.ö

õThere always seems to be someone in the family who has more of a passion for the foundations. I know in my family, my sister, April, was the one who had a passion for the foundation we started. She was so fervent about it; she would also take it personally that we were not as passionate. I think our eventual indifference about it led to her giving up on it. That is something I regret, but not something I think I could have changed. The passion was just not there for some of us.ö

õI hope Vickie feels she has adequate support from me. I know it is a lot to take on, and itøs not that I donøt believe in the cause, itøs just I canøt be surrounded by that all day.ö

õI understand the need for an escape.ö

õYes, and just like maybe school was an escape for you, work is for me. Sometimes I feel for Vickie because she has just surrounded herself with the foundation, Griefshare, and she stays at home with Sarah and has to continually deal with her issues. Iøm thankful I can escape.ö

õI donøt think anyone would blame you for that. I can say that after Jeremyøs death I immersed myself in the foundation, but to a greater extent I devoted my time to studying death and dying, I think in an effort to try to make sense of it all. After a while, I was ready to move on to the next topic, because I had exhausted myself and others in the process of writing about it.ö I wonder if Vickie will experience the burnout members of my family experienced, including me. In Pauløs account of his grief versus Vickiøs, he contrasts õescapeö from grief as opposed to Vickiøs more constant immersion in her grief support group and Cooperøs foundation. He and I both use a movement or journey metaphor when talking about progressing through grief. This imagery of movement versus being stuck is a tension that underlies our choices about how we commemorate the loss.

õDo you do anything differently during the holidays than you did before Cooperøs death?ö I ask.

õIt is just physically exhausting to get through the holidays. Vickie and I try to be upbeat for Christopher and Sarah, but it is impossible at times. We

usually set up a large tree in the game room, and a more formal tree in the living room, but Vickie just couldnøt do it in the game room the Christmas after Cooper died.ö Certain family members may find the absence of the deceased family member to be reason enough to place a suspension on celebrations, which often causes a repetitive state of unhappiness and grief for all family members (Imber-Black, 1991; Roberts, 2003). The Littles would fit into the category defined at *interrupted ritual* families by McGoldrick (1991). They have trouble participating in ritual because of the trauma.

Paul continues, õDuring the holidays, Sarah expressed how much she missed not having ÷theirø tree in the game room. Instead of ignoring it, we decided to put it up and actually had so much fun doing it. We decorated it together with all of the ornaments the kids made over the years. We laughed and shared memories about Cooper. Iøm thankful that Sarah didnøt let us give up on that ritual because it ended up bringing us together and created a space to share about Cooper.ö

Paul continues, õAnother example I can think of is kind of silly, but I havenøt stopped doing it just because of Cooperøs death. There are these collectible reindeer plates that have a different theme painted on them every year. I started getting the kids their own plate every year in the hopes they would be able to use them when they move out and have families of their own. I still get Cooper a plate, I donøt know for how many years I will continue to get him one, but it just doesnøt feel right to not get him one too.ö

He pauses and looks up in thought, õso I guess we do have more rituals

than I thought. The rituals I described are probably very different from Vickieøs. Iøm sure hers revolve around the foundation. And while I think that is great, I just enjoy the simple time we have as a family. I still appreciate those times so much.ö

õI agree! I get so much comfort and support when I spend time with my family.ö

õThat is so true. Well, Julia, I think it is great what you are doing with your graduate work. I think you have the possibility to help a lot of people who are struggling. It is not an easy topic to talk about, but I think we should talk about it more. I think too many people suffer in silence. I really appreciate your view as a surviving sibling too; it helps me appreciate Sarahøs experience more.ö

õThank you so much for agreeing to speak with me and share your experiences. I know they will resonate with other survivors.ö

õI hope so.ö

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this dissertation has been to show how families use communicative resources to make sense of the sudden loss of a young adult child. The study was driven in part by my own experience of the loss of my brother but I also examined a number of other cases. I used interpretive methods to explore family membersø accounts of how they coped with their losses, as they entered this uncharted emotional territory, and I gave particular attention to their use of ritual in memorializing the lost loved one.

In writing this dissertation, I relied heavily on the idea of narrative as a powerful resource for enabling survivors to structure and in some cases, to õrestoryö their experiences in order to find new meanings and preferred outcomes (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1993). Through my own narrative and my analysis of the narratives of others, I have tried to show how survivors were able to find meaning and coherence in a seemingly unintelligible experience.

My study builds on the idea that communication, and narrative in particular, helps to create social realities by shaping perceptions of what is appropriate or õnormal. Using social constructionism (Gergen, 1991) as a theoretical framework, I focused on how meanings of loss are constructed through the use of language and other symbols. Social constructionism encourages questions about how meanings are created in everyday interactions, as well as

how we rely on and are constrained by õfoundö or received meanings and how we transform them through communication (Eisenberg, 2007; Gergen, 1991).

In this concluding chapter, I present some final reflections on the findings of the study. I examine the implications of this research and its contributions to the literature on bereavement. I conclude with the limitations and possible directions for future studies.

Significant Findings

My study addresses two research questions: What is the role of family stories and rituals in making sense of the sudden loss of teenage and young adult children? How does a survivorøs role as sibling or parent impact the grieving process? In an effort to answer the first research question I used an inductive thematic approach to analyze family membersø accounts of their ritual practices (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). In an effort to respond to the second research question I employed narrative analysis (Riessman, 1990; Linde, 1993; Ochs & Capps, 2001) to show the participantsø distinctive ways of storying their experiences.

The findings in this research contribute to the literature on bereavement in several ways. Contrary to modernist perspectives (Stroebe et al., 1996) that see the maintenance of attachments to the deceased as problematic, I found that continuing bonds were common among the participating families. More specifically, I found that by reaffirming these bonds through rituals, stories, and even dreams, family members were often able to achieve a sense of continuity and stability that enabled them to move on with a meaningful life.

The rituals practiced by these families fell roughly into the original categories proposed by Wolin and Bennett (1984), beginning with õfamily celebrationsö but their accounts emphasized the interplay between mourning and celebration in these occasions. This was illustrated in Lauraøs description of the funeral as a collective effort by the family to make sure her sisterøs memory was honored. Participants also stressed the hardship of enacting celebratory rituals such as weddings and holidays after the loss of the family member. Even so, many of them found ways to keep performing the ritual under changed circumstances, such as the Littlesø decision to keep decorating the Christmas tree during the year Cooper died.

Participants also identified rituals corresponding to the õfamily traditionsö category (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). According to Grimes (2000) the remembering that takes place during the anniversary of a loved oneøs death serves a critical creative purpose. Elizabeth, Laura, and their mother, Elise, found comfort in going to the Twinless Twins conference on the death anniversary; this can be seen an extremely creative response to loss, as was the Littlesø decision to throw a birthday party for their deceased son as a way to celebrate Cooperøs life with his friends and family.

The participants in this study also showed how the õfamily interactionsö (Wolin & Bennettt, 1984) can be some of the most painful family rituals after the loss, especially when taken-for-grated routines are disrupted. Katrina, for example, mourned the end of late night talks with her deceased sister and Lonnie realized that he can no longer look forward to a Sunday afternoon phone call from

his son. The absence of these types of rituals is a constant reminder to survivors that they have lost a loved one. At the same time, new rituals are enacted ranging from sleeping in the bed of the lost loved one as Elizabethøs sister did to taking a ski vacation near where oneøs child died, as Barbara did. The invention and adoption of new rituals seems to serve an important role in õsuccessfulö grieving as a way of sustaining bonds.

As noted earlier, every survivor searches for meaning after a loss, and according to some researchers, it is those people who can find something positive to emerge as the result of a tragedy who adapt better than those who do not. The act of searching for something positive is termed õbenefit findingö (Nolen-Hoekseama & Larson, 1998). Many of the participants in this study described their efforts to gain a sense of control and mastery by channeling their energies through creative acts. Three families, counting my own, established foundations to honor their children, and another established a support group. This benefit-finding also showed up vividly in participantsø stories. For example, Barbara was able to reframe the way she viewed Jordanøs participation on a suicide website by emphasizing Jordanøs role in saving another girløs life. Elizabeth found benefit through the idea that her sisterøs death has strengthened the bonds she has with her other siblings and parents. Perhaps Mark was the most vocal about how he has found the benefits surrounding his brotherøs death: õAs awful as that time was, I would not take any of it back, because it helped shape me into who I am today. I have a wonderful relationship with my present wife and two beautiful daughters. I know all of that had to happen in order for me to be happy today.ö

The stories were not uniformly positive. Most of the participants identified secondary losses they have experienced as a result of their loved oneøs death. Mark attributes the demise of his first marriage to his brotherøs death and the strain his grief put on the marriage. Barbara expresses extreme sadness over the fact that she will most likely never have grandchildren as a result of her sonøs death. One of the major secondary losses I felt within my own family was how the grief put an enormous strain on our relationships within the family unit. Sometimes I wonder if the hurt feelings that each of us suffered during that time will ever be resolved. I am hopeful that they will with time. When I was able to step back and observe the way these losses were woven into their larger stories, I could see that participants rely on a sense of connection and causality across events. Viewed from this perspective, Elizabethøs motherøs cancer and Markøs divorce are not simply random events, but part of a larger pattern. Judging from their willingness to talk about tragic events, as well as their general tone of optimism about their lives and futures, these coping strategies seem to be working

Another key finding to emerge from my study has to do with õgrievingö as a culturally significant, often normative, term. In my personal narrative with my sister, April, she expresses an opinion on the way each person in the family is grieving. This is a common occurrence among family members in my study, and it has been identified in the literature as õpolicing the grieving by establishing norms for the feelings and behaviors of the survivorsö (Neimeyer et al, 2002, 237). This policing was evident in Markøs account of how his surviving brother Trey had not grieved in an õopenö and õhealthyö manner and in his judgmental

stance. Elizabeth felt as though one of her surviving siblings had lost her way after Ashleyøs death and made too many wrong life decisions involving drugs, alcohol, and her choice for a marriage partner. Both Mark and Elizabeth expressed the feeling that they not only lost one sibling literally, but they also lost their living sibling and the relationship with him or her. Each family memberøs reactions were very different, but judgments about whose grieving is õhealthierö are not necessarily easy to determine. One major theme that emerged from all of the interviews was that expressions of grief are highly individual, and that within a family such differences loom large.

Throughout the interviews I was looking for similarities or differences between the siblingsø and parentsø experiences. It is widely noted that parental grief has received more attention than sibling grief (Riches & Dawson, 2000; Schwab, 1992; Todd, 2007). This has led to the placement of the surviving sibling into the õforgotten grieverö category (Doka, 1989). During our interview, Elizabeth, a sibling, actually asked me if I had received adequate support from my peers. She felt as though she lost friends during that time and did not receive the social support she craved. In contrast, when I asked Barbara, a mother, if she felt stigmatized at all after the death of her son, Jordan, to suicide she responded that she received an abundance of social support during that time and continues to receive it, saying, õthat was something I did not expect to receive, but hoped to, and I desperately needed it.ö Klass (1996) noted that parents put a significant amount of importance on the social response to the death. Barbara demonstrated this by describing how she reads through the condolence cards when she wants to

remember how much Jordan was loved by friends and family.

The parents I interviewed in this research expressed more feelings of guilt related to the death than the siblings. This fining is supported by the research that identifies guilt as one of the major contributing factors to parental grief (Miles & Demi, 1983; Videka-Sherman & Lieberman, 1985). Barbara told me that she struggled with not recognizing that Jordan was in trouble and that she should have immediately boarded a plane to see him whenever her instincts initially told her that something was wrong. Yet she seems to have come to terms with the guilt saying, õI had to realize there was nothing I could have done to save his life.ö Paul, a surviving father, feels guilt for not showing his grief to his two surviving children. His daughter is struggling socially and academically in school, and he feels like he may be the one to blame.

The siblings in this study all noted the intimacy of the communication they shared with their lost sibling during their lifetime (Markowitz, 1994). Katrina noted how she missed the late-night talks she always shared with Mary. Mark described the closeness he shared with his brother, Brian, when Brian came to stay with him during a difficult time. õWe did everything together during that time. We bonded and it was awesome.ö Elizabeth told me that her sister, Ashley, had confided in her before her death and that she felt closer to her because of that. Neither Barbara nor Paul expressed an intimate knowledge of their deceased childrenøsø lives before the death.

Robinson and Mahon (1997) introduced õprohibited mourningö as protective posture siblings often take in an effort to protect their parents after the

death. Mark and I discussed this concept at length and both feel strongly that many surviving siblings demonstrate this behavior. Although we both recognized the concept in our own experience, none of the other participants, siblings or parents, acknowledged prohibited mourning.

Reflexivity

Because I used qualitative, interpretive methods in my research, it remains important to acknowledge the role I play as a survivor myself. I am not an objective observer of a family of survivors, but rather a participant in research that explores survivorsø sensemaking processes after the death of a loved one. I committed to looking back reflexively at how my own presence affected the findings, and question whether my account of a participantøs experience was accurate, õor whether there might be yet another, equally useful way to study, characterize, display, read, or otherwise understand the accumulated field materialsö (VanMaanen, 1988, p. 51). During this process, it became apparent that I had to consider if my role of researcher-as-survivor had an effect on the interviews and the content that participants chose to disclose or withhold from me. I wondered if they felt more comfortable sharing about their loss with me because I had experienced a loss of my own and whether this was the main reason some of the participants chose to participate in my research. Perhaps some participants shared more information with me about their loss than they would with someone who had not experienced a death. Riessman (1990) informs us that õnarratives are always edited versions of reality, not objective and impartial descriptions of it, and interviewees always make choices about what to divulgeö

(p. 1197). I had to consider if my role as a survivor contributed to the choices they made about what they divulged. However, I came to realize that this was not necessarily a limitation to the study in the sense that our shared identities facilitated conversation about what might otherwise have been a difficult topic to discuss.

Elliot Mishler (1991) stresses the importance of viewing the interview as a joint-event between the researcher and participant. Through his own work in interviewing from a clinical position in psychiatry, Mishler shows how interviews can be analyzed and written as narrative accounts. He shows how the participants have a more substantial role as the collaborators in the research process. It was through reading research like Mishlerøs that I learned the importance of trying to make sure the participants in this study did not see me as an õexpert.ö I reasoned they would not feel as comfortable with the natural progression of asking and answering questions during the interview if they had this perception of me. During the interview process it became evident that I struggled with different identities. Was I, as a fellow survivor, a co-producer of an interview? An expert in this field? Or in some cases the clinician? I felt as though different participants brought out these different identities. For example, I had the most commonalities with Elizabeth partly because of age, partly because we both had to tell our fathers that they had lost a child, and finally because we share a strong sense of faith. I believe this may have created more trust between Elizabeth and me and that she felt more comfortable sharing the deeper elements of her story with me. In contrast, although Katrina and I had known each other for some time,

she did not go as deeply into her feelings and concerns as Elizabeth did in our interviews. We did discuss our commonality of faith, but I felt as though our age difference increased her perception of me as the õexpertö in all things related to grief. This was evident the first time I saw her after Maryøs death at the funeral when she immediately asked for me to mentor her through the surviving sibling grief process. Katrina held me tightly in the role of expert as opposed to Mark who spoke as though he was the grief expert. He may have felt comfortable assuming this role because when I first met him he indeed was the grief expert as the facilitator of a surviving siblingsø support group that I attended. By the end of the interviews, I felt one of the strongest connections to Barbara, who lost her son, Jordan to suicide. We did not know each other before the interviews, but by the last interaction she grabbed my hand and spoke to me in a loving way as though I was her daughter. The relationship we were able to build after such a short time was amazing to me and I believe was special to her. She mentioned how much she appreciated just being able to talk about Jordan to someone who wanted to hear the story. I had little interaction with Paul before our interviews and I believe he viewed me as more of a counselor to help him better understand his own daughterøs actions and emotions. I admitted that this projection made me a bit uncomfortable because I am not a licensed therapist. But there is an undeniable clinical element to this research when some of the participants like Betty Jean mentioned that it had õhelpedö her to talk about her son with someone who was willing to listen. And in the example with Paul, he was looking for someone to give advice on how to help his daughter. Overall, it was important for

me to consider how my identity was interactively constructed and what role I believe participants ascribed to me during the interview process.

I also had to consider how writing my own grief story may have affected how I wrote the grief stories of my participants. Varela (1984) envisages the creative circle of the hand rising out of the paper creating a loop as it plunges back down to the white sheet. He states, õAt this point, what we wanted to hold in separate levels is revealed as inseparable, our sense of direction and foundation seems to falter, and a sense of paradox sets in (310).ö I find a correspondence between Varelaøs rising hand and the circular nature of writing grief. It was not possible for me to not include my own interpretations and experiences as I tried to tell the stories told by others.

After conducting the research on grief it became apparent that there are numerous different models. I thought it was important to consider what my personal model of grief is and how I came to have this awareness. When the participants brought up concerns of õgrief workö and talked about whom in their respective families was õdoing griefö correctly I was invited to consider if I make similar designations with my own family members. I would like to think that I demonstrate a post-modern (Stroebe et al., 1991) understanding that grief is an evolutionary process that someone does not just get over. I believe this personal grief model originated out of my own grief experience and talking with others who have experienced a loss. I understand a loss as something that a person adapts to, while continuing to experience grief at different stages throughout their lives.

I also considered how these interviews might have been cathartic for me as well as the participants. As some of the participants expressed, they do not have the opportunity to discuss their loved ones often, and I feel the same constraint. Through the creation of a space to co-share (Mishler, 1991) I was able to share my story of loss. I believe each survivor faces the fear that their loved oneøs memory will be lost, and therefore just the act of speaking the lost loved oneøs name can bring a sense of peace arising from a sense that the loved oneøs memory is still alive.

Directions for Future Studies

This project, while showing the sensemaking processes after the loss of a family member, leaves open the possibility for more in-depth research in survivorsø lives. One possibility is to follow up with the survivors as they progress into different stages of their lives. Do they continue to use the same methods to help make sense of life after the loss? Have they ceased using rituals that initially brought them comfort after the death? How have their retrospective and prospective narratives changed with the passage of time? The prospect for longitudinal narrative research on these participants presents exciting possibilities for the future.

Another concept that arose from this research that could be explored in a future study is the impact on survivors of organizing a non-profit organization after the loved oneøs death. What is interesting about these organizations is the public setting they create for the survivors to display their grief or loss to others. Some questions to ask could be: what purpose do these public rituals like a 5k run

or scholarship awarding ceremony serve for the survivors? Are they a way for the survivor to push aside their private grief by exerting their energy in these public expressions? And are they a healthy outlet in which to oneøs channel grief? Most of the participants in this study were not in the initial stages of grief, making it difficult to get a sense of how such activities might have altered the grieving process.

The participant pool was limited to those families who had lost a teenage or young adult family member. It would be beneficial to include different age groups in a future study to find commonalities and differences. It was also my initial wish to include all members of the nuclear family, but I was unable to achieve this for different reasons unique to each family. I believe a future study that includes all members from nuclear families would bolster research in family bereavement. Another limitation to the participant pool was that all the families were from one region of the country, middle-class, and Caucasian. I would have liked to include a family from a different socio-economic class and/or ethnicity.

This study holds potential benefits for those scholars interested in the bereavement process and its effects on the family system. Furthermore, therapists who treat families might find the insights these participants contribute to be helpful in creating ways to communicate with their clients. I hope this research can also help those who served as the impetus for its conception, the survivors.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

'"'

This consent is for minimal risk research.
This consent is NOT APPLICABLE to VA Studies. Delete this box and all instructions from the final consent.

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study
IRB Study # _______________

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study.
I am asking you to take part in a research study that is called: When Families Memorialize: Finding Ways to Remember after the Death of a Loved One with a Focus on the Sibling Experience.
The person who is in charge of this research study is Julia Barnhill. This person is called the Principal Investigator.
The research will be done at a place and time of your choosing to meet, i.e. coffee café, your home, restaurant, etc.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to

- The purpose of this study is to explore how families utilize ritual in the grieving process with a focus primarily on the siblingøs experience. This research will fulfill the requirements to complete my dissertation.

Study Procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to

- Participate in two interviews to discuss your experiences with family ritual.
- The participation time should last from 3 to 6 hours total.
- The interview can be completed at a time convenient to you as well as a place that you find comfortable.

- The data will be recorded with an audio digital recording device and then transferred to a hard copy that will be stored on the researcherøs computer as well as on an USB port. It will be stored in a secure office and retained by the researcher. After five years, the data will be destroyed.

Alternatives

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.

Benefits

The potential benefits to you are:
You will have a chance to reflect on your experiences of family ritual after a death in the family. Research has shown that telling stories about our experiences can be therapeutic personally and also help people who are going through or will go through similar situations.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation

I will not pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Confidentiality

We must keep your study records as confidential as possible. The digital recording will be stored for 5 years. It will be stored in a secured office. However, certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- The Principal Investigator

  Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.) These include:

  - The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the staff that work for the IRB. Other individuals who work for USF that provide other kinds of oversight may also need to look at your records.
  - The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

I may publish what I learn from this study. If I do, I will not let anyone know your name. I will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are.

Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study, to please the investigator. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study

Questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Julia Barnhill at (318)-342-1023. You can also reach her faculty advisor, Jane Jorgenson, at (813)-974-7282, Communication Department, 4202 E. Fowler Ave, CIS 1040, USF, Tampa, FL 33620.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-9343.

If you experience an unanticipated problem related to the research call Julia Barnhill at (318)-450-5255.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

____

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study Date

____

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.
I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands:

- What the study is about.
- What procedures/interventions/investigational drugs/devices will be used.
- What the potential benefits might be.
- What the known risks might be.

____

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent Date

____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent