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Creating Meaning in the Face of Bereavement, an Adult Child's Perspective

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory and presence of everyone I love –  
Those who are here and those who have gone before





## Abstract

This dissertation offers my personal exploration of the loss of my father through the eyes of multiple selves. Utilizing an arts-inspired autoethnographic narrative case study approach, I detail my journey of meaning making as I explore my personal transitions and self-discovery in the face of my bereavement, while also uncovering the potential for growth and development within my relationship with my dad. Throughout this dissertation, I incorporate a variety of mediums to capture the essence of the experience of my filial bereavement. Through this synthesis of form, it is my goal to invite witnesses to enter my experience, to have the opportunity to explore a different way of knowing by being able to look through the eyes of my multiple experiencing selves and their presentation of emotion, thought, and behaviour. Through blending of genre, this study provides a unique way of exploring a lived experience. It is meant to provide a specific view of a broad topic from multiple angles. Though it is situated within my personal bereavement, a daughter's loss of her father, and inevitably my story will demonstrate the cultural influence of my Canadian background, it also aims to touch on aspects of the universality of loss, of bereavement, and what it means to be alive.



**DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and effort and that it has not been submitted anywhere for any award. Where other sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

Signature: .....

Date: .....



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*The rabbit-hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself before she found herself falling down a very deep well.*

*~ Alice in Wonderland, p.13*



## *Preface*

*SEHN, Randall Matthew*

*Passed away on Saturday, April 4, 2009 at the age of 58. He is survived by his immediate family: children Jason and Zoë... Linda... Predeceased by his mother Greta, father Charles and brother Timothy. Freed at last to drive the angels crazy. Say hi to Grandma and the Hippy Dippy Weatherman. A memorial service will be held on... Please come and bring an **antidote**...*

An antidote? It was supposed to say *anecdote*!

When it was first discovered that the local newspaper had made a typo in my father's obituary I was horrified. This message had been sent out into the world as a record of my father's passing, how could a blunder such as this have been made? In rapid succession, I experienced outrage, despondency, apathy, until finally my emotions settled on humour. Humour? You might ask. Yes. Humour. I may have initially felt that this negligent journalism was an affront to my father's life and death, but upon further reflection, I would bet anything that my dad would have found it hilarious.

And really, isn't there a bit of truth held within this typographical error? Isn't this what we, the bereaved, are searching for, an antidote to the pain, suffering, and confusion that are left behind when someone we love dies?

In many ways, upon reflection of the process of this project, I can now acknowledge that my dissertation has had the quality of self-medication. It has been an antidote to my experience of bereavement as an adult child. Dissecting my experience of loss, my relationship with my dad, and aspects of myself has helped me to make meaning of my bereavement experience(s). My journey has helped me to understand the impact of this and other losses in my life, additional bereavements and otherwise, on who I am and who I would like to become. I have been changed by this process. My

identity has been altered by looking at who I am and who I was. In a sense, my tearing down my experience has helped to build me up and bring me back together.

While the summary of the path I'm describing may sound formed and complete, a simple journey, this would be an illusion. This journey has not been down a well-worn path that meanders through shaded areas, lined with tended flowerbeds and benches for relaxing in the warmth of noonday sun. The journey down this path has been at dusk, dulling the vision and creating nightmarish phantasies; the way fraught with tangled weeds that catch at your feet, thorny bushes that draw blood as they scrape the skin and tear at your hair, and strange noises echoing in the wild.

*Acquainted with the Night – Robert Frost*

*I have been one acquainted with the night.  
I have walked out in rain -- and back in rain.  
I have outwalked the furthest city light.*

*I have looked down the saddest city lane.  
I have passed by the watchman on his beat  
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.*

*I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet  
When far away an interrupted cry  
Came over houses from another street,*

*But not to call me back or say good-bye;  
And further still at an unearthly height,  
A luminary clock against the sky*

*Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.  
I have been one acquainted with the night.*

This is not a journey for the faint-hearted. And yet... and yet, I will return to my earlier statement, that this journey has been an antidote to my pain.

Pain has been part of this project, but there has been a complex interplay of emotion throughout. I went into this project wanting to hold the truthfulness of these varied emotions, to include and remember positive feelings about my relationship with my dad and even those positive emotions I held about his death. I didn't want to just remember the pain. But I also did not want to fall into the trap so commonly associated with post-humus remembrance, where there could be only space for the joys of his life and our relationship. When my dad died I vowed that I would not forget that he had been a multifaceted man, both good and bad, and that our relationship had been complex. I have been a witness to the improvement of those who have passed away after they've gone, as family and friends rewrite history and change who that person had been while living. Gone were any faults replaced by a golden glow of perfection, the halo to a newfound angelic-ness. As much as I disliked, and even hated some of those facets that comprised my perception of my father, and the choices associated with these aspects of him, they were his facets, his choices, and it would be to actively change who he was to try to remember him differently.

But before I could explore meaning within the loss of my father I needed to gain distance, and perhaps ironically, perhaps understandably, it was this distance that enabled me to get close to and get inside of my own story. While the documentation of this journey began several years after his death I believe the creation of this story began much sooner and has involved a process of entering and exiting the story in an organic way. This is not a story with a nice, tidy ending, as you will see. It is left undone though not completely unresolved. There is more to come. And just when it may seem as though the conclusion is forthcoming, instead a new chapter will be presented with new plot

twists, defined by unpredictability. But what does it mean to you to hear me say what my journey was? No, I will let you explore my explorations for yourself.

I have done something unconventional (though not out of character) and I suppose I should warn you that you will become part of this break with tradition, for, should you continue, you will be a witness to my experience and in turn become part of my experience. I invite you to witness where I have been, to judge how far I have come, to meet with me at the darkest depths, to see through my eyes.

Bearing witness is a human-to-human way of being-relating, a mode of co-existence. Bearing witness is being present and attentive to the truth of another's experiences. (Naef, 2006, p.146)

What I am asking of you as witness is to allow yourself to share my experiences through listening to and connecting with the stories I will present, to coexist with me in a shared sense of humanity (Naef, 2006). Bearing witness in this manner means that I am asking you to willingly engage with me and my stories, though you may find this challenging.

In therapeutic terms, having a witness can also be an important feature for individuals who are working through the narrative of their grief as they construct and/or reconstruct meaning through the telling of their stories to a compassionate other (Whiting & Bradley, 2007). While such a relational dynamic may be inherent to the therapeutic relationship, the role of the witness may not always be occupied by a therapist (Thirsk & Moules, 2012). Therapeutic witnessing, as this may be called, involves more than simply acting as an observer. Instead there is an aspect of providing expansion to presented narratives, where the witness may bring her own understanding as well as support, which can aid in healing (Thirsk & Moules, 2012). In addition, the

silent focus of a witness who holds her experiences and responses to the stories that are presented to her can provide a sense of security, safety, and containment for the individual who is exploring and sharing herself (Wyman-McGinty, 1998). In this way, those who engage in therapeutic witnessing may act not only as a companion but also as a guide or a collaborator, someone who can help to shape the narratives they witness while also being shaped by them (Whiting & Bradley, 2007). And though we are not physically together on this journey, I am writing this knowing you are there.

I believe that witnessing another's story is an essential form of human engagement not just within research or within the field of psychotherapy and counseling, but also more broadly as part of all human interactions throughout life. And while I discuss my stories separately there is connection not only within them, but between us. We are separate but in relationship, and though you may view me as other, I am asking you to join me for this journey, to hold a willingness to explore my experiences and view them through my eyes, to allow yourself to feel, and then to risk becoming part of my stories. By bearing witness I am asking you to acknowledge and collaborate with me even when faced with a multitude of emotions that may be confusing or even contradictory. And perhaps your bearing witness to this journey will help to formulate 'what next'.

What follows is an arts-inspired autoethnographic narrative case study of my experience of the death of my father. Like a tapestry, I attempt to weave various threads together to illustrate experience. It is an integration of story, poetry, song; individual threads used to create a whole that incorporates and defies tradition. To assist in the movement towards understanding beyond that of simple cognition, I have included the

voices of experience as well music that touches upon my experience on an accompanying DVD. Specific track numbers of the narratives of my experience that can be found on this DVD are indicated, as are the songs that I have chosen to accompany the stories and certain sections of this project. This disk should be able to be played on most computers and/or DVD players. I hope you will take the opportunity to listen to the audio recordings. This can be done as part of the reading of the dissertation, though it is also meant to be able to stand alone as a heartfelt representation of my loss and mourning process so far.

So what is the purpose of this research? My aim has been to document my journey of meaning making in the face of my bereavement of my father through the use of an arts-inspired autoethnographic narrative case study approach. However, I am attempting to create questions instead of provide answers. I aim to know nothing through gaining knowledge. And while this dissertation will be judged on an end product, for me the true purpose is closer kin to my philosophy of living: it is and has been a journey not a destination. So, between us, I believe that the purpose is in the process, the medium is the message, not only for me, but for you as witness. Only you can judge the value of this journey for you, whether you feel that I have brought you into an experience, helped you to achieve understanding, encouraged your discovery of new questions.

Now, take my hand and hold your breath as we tumble down this rabbit hole. Together.

Please turn your attention now to the accompanying DVD wherein you will find a slideshow of photographs of the life of my father, Randall Sehn.

## Chapter 1 Down the Rabbit Hole

*“Cheshire Puss,” she began, rather timidly, as she did not at all know whether it would like the name: however, it only grinned a little wider. “Come, it’s pleased so far,” thought Alice, and she went on. “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”*

*“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.*

*“I don’t much care where – ” said Alice.*

*“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat.*

*“ – so long as I get somewhere,” Alice added as an explanation.*

*“Oh, you’re sure to do that,” said the Cat, “if you only walk long enough.” Alice felt that this could not be denied, so she tried another question. “What sort of people live about here?”*

*“In that direction,” the Cat said, waving its right paw round, “lives a Hatter: and in that direction,” waving the other paw, “lives a March Hare. Visit either you like: they’re both mad.”*

*“But I don’t want to go among mad people,” Alice remarked.*

*“Oh, you can’t help that,” said the Cat: “we’re all mad here. I’m mad, you’re mad.”*

*“How do you know I’m mad?” said Alice.*

*“You must be,” said the Cat, “or you wouldn’t have come here.”*

*~ Alice in Wonderland, p.103 – 104*

*Welcome to Wonderland, an Introduction*

Sometimes I talk to myself. They say you aren't crazy until you answer back.

Sometimes I do.

Now is one of those times. And while I have occasionally wondered at my sanity at different points in time within my experience of loss, I know it is a measure of my current state of mental health that I am able to give voice to myself. In searching for a way of exploring my experience, I have come to the conclusion that I must, in some way keep aspects of myself apart while at the same time create a dialogue between these differing 'selves'. Like Walt Whitman describes in his poem *Song of Myself*, "I contain multitudes" (1881, n.p.). This dialogical view of the self involves the adoption of a multiplicity of positions (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). For example, I use my reflective self to edit and explore the narrative of my experiencing self or, more accurately, my experiencing *selves*. This sort of 'inner conversation' can be conceived of as similar to an intersubjective dialogue between therapist and client, where efforts are made to meet one another in the dialogue and both emerge changed as a result of the interaction (Jacobs, 2009), though instead of a conversation between therapist and client the dialogue will be between my selves within myself.

The dominant and repeating voice throughout this project is my researcher 'I', which could also be called the 'core-position' (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). One of the tasks of the researcher 'I' has been to connect with my many 'selves' within my grief. While not all aspects of me has her say documented, through my investigation I have invited these unique parts to bring my story into the world in a diverse array of form. My goal has been to obtain personal accounts and representations of my

experience of the loss of my father. These personal accounts will not follow a linear time-frame, they may conflict, and the stories of the self may engender new positions altogether highlighting what I view to be the fluidity of the self. To complicate matters further, I am attempting to collect these stories in a format that will enable a further external other (you) to bear witness to these interactions and allow you to envision your own interpretation of my world. The weight of having to keep track of all of these potentialities, whilst simultaneously tearing into the meat of my own horrific experience, has been both daunting and exciting. I have also attempted to suspend my own internal judgments in order to let the honest experience and emotions be made known as I have not always known down which path I could be led.

Invariably my commitment to speaking with aspects of my own experience raises the question ‘How is this research?’ and I suppose, in a traditional, positivistic sense, what I am presenting does not fit the mould. But I am not conducting a traditional, positivist research project. Instead, I attempt to offer something different, something that you may find unique. What will follow is an arts-inspired autoethnographic narrative case study. In brief, as I will expand on this later (see ‘Curiouser and Curiouser’ – an Exploration of Autoethnography), this form of research is not bound by tradition, but attempts to enter a different space. As such, you may question the validity of what I am offering. But I ask you to follow my lead and suspend judgement should the roots of your questions originate within positivistic research tradition soil. I make no attempt to fit within such delineations.

*Alice laughed. “There’s no use trying,” she said: “one can’t believe impossible things.”*

*“I daresay you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”*

*~ Alice Through the Looking Glass, p.104-105*

The purpose of autoethnography is to explore a subject from a place of deep personal significance, while also providing flexibility within method as well as what qualifies as ‘data’. For example, the stories presented by my different selves provide the narrative of various facets of my experience of loss. The purpose of exploring topics in this manner is to enable a deeper sense of understanding of a lived experience. Carrying on from this qualitative research tradition, I am also utilizing artistic representation as a means of engaging with the topic of bereavement, to engage with myself and my experiences, and hopefully this multifaceted approach will help to engage you, my witness.

Art as knowledge does not have strong roots in traditional paradigms. Instead of as a tool to provide information, the arts have previously been viewed as simply a way to connect with emotion; the arts are not rational. However, in spite of criticism of the use of arts in research, knowledge according to positivistic traditions may not be sufficient when aspects of knowing become ineffable and language unable to capture understanding. My experience of the loss of my father has felt this way. I have found that my verbal vocabulary, in particular within the frame of my academic voice, has sometimes proved insufficient in enabling me to express the totality of my experience. Contemporary research efforts have begun to redefine knowledge to accept a multiplicity of circumstances and aims. There is a growing acceptance that ‘knowing’

may hold multiple forms that allow access to otherwise unattainable possibilities of expression. In addition to auditory or visual representation, this may also include “artistically crafted prose” (Eisner, 2008, p.6), which goes beyond simple description to evoke an empathetic participation by those who witness the account.

The purpose of my research is to present my process of meaning making of my bereavement experience, a project with inherently emotional components. So too can my experience not be contained within ‘rational’. However, the use of artistic representation has empowered the voices within my experience to emerge. I feel connected to the concept that the process of understanding is ongoing for social scientists who utilize artistic forms of representation (Leggo, 2008) as my process of making meaning does not end with the final page of this document. The open-ended nature of arts-inspired research implies that the research process is vital not only to the end product, but also to the researcher herself. By means of crafting, theorizing, and defining within arts-inspired research, transformation will continue alongside researcher growth and development.

It is likely that I will further segregate my project from the norm through melding my data within the body of the work as well as attempting to bring you, my witness, on a journey with me, in and out of experiential and academic understanding. Interspersed with discussions of bereavement literature, further explorations of methodology and ethics, or other necessary ‘dissertation’ sections, you will find story, literature, song lyrics and music, photographs, poetry, and art. I am using the inclusion of multiple forms of art as a means of welcoming witnesses into my experience, both academics and individuals whose perspectives have not been influenced within an academic institution. I am hopeful that the use of mixed genres within this project will

stimulate questions, not only about form and function within research, but for aspects of the personal, unique to each witness.

Such integration may feel uncomfortable. Perhaps it may seem jarring to have exposed emotions intertwined with less affective academic content. I have positioned these components in such a manner on purpose as my meaning making process has gone back and forth between deep emotional connection to the subject matter, and my own personal need to remove myself to gain focus. Meaning making for me has, of necessity, incorporated two seemingly opposite outlooks, the personal and the academic, and my own experience of this process has been jagged.

My primary art as data within this project is personal narrative, which can support meaning construction (Higgs, 2008). The vignettes I present could be considered pieces of creative non-fiction (Barone, 2008a), though when considering these short pieces I think of myself as a storyteller. These constructions are my own, the interweaving of memory and experience presented in what I hope is an artful manner. They are constructions based on past and present that have changed as a result of their telling. Stories are an inherent part of human understanding, it is through story that humans are able to make sense of the world, and as such, within research story can act as subject and method (Ellis, 2004). Narrative provides a potential means of observing the connections from past constructions through the present and possibly project into the future: “the emphasis is on changes in participants’ lives and how each change is given sense by the person in terms of previous events and other transitions” (Dallos & Vetere, 2005, p.69).

As I have stated previously, I have recorded the stories provided by my selves with the intention of adding a performative layer to this project. It was during a presentation of my research that I realized the potential impact of the spoken word. Reading my vignettes to others felt poignant, a feeling that was reflected in the responses of those who were witnesses to these tellings. According to them, hearing my story aloud enabled deeper engagement, and allowed for a greater sense of the experience.

The use of art in any form within this study began with music. My experiment with the inclusion of music began with the desire to include a single song that held meaning for me within my relationship with my dad as well as throughout my bereavement experience – ‘Winter’ by Tori Amos. From here, I began to make connections between other pieces of music from my personal history, music that is part of the North American culture in which my story is embedded, with additional aspects of this project. For me, these songs provide auditory connections. They are familiar sounds that evoke memories but that I feel can be evocative when incorporated into new contexts. However, although arts-inspired research has the potential to touch a broad audience, this form of research may also alienate people if the audience cannot relate. Not everyone will have the same frame of reference for the music I have chosen to include. In fact, you as witness may have different songs that you perceive would fit better with the subject and stories. However, incorporating aspects of popular culture, potentially relevant to a large number of witnesses regardless of educational background, may provide a more open scope for dissemination. And should anyone not

connect with my selections and begin to think of life in terms of their own artful representations, I have achieved my goal.

I explore my experience through an additional form of linguistic practice: poetry. I have chosen to include not only my own creations, but poetry and lyrics that have helped me to engage in my research journey. Poetry allows for a different kind of engagement with text that fits within an unconventional approach to understanding, where significance can be found throughout (Leggo, 2008). There is an invitation within poetic expression that enables the witness to give pause, to take space, and allows a moment to digest what has come before and to prepare for what will follow. “Poetry invites a way of uniting the heart, mind, imagination, body, and spirit” (Leggo, 2008, p.167), demonstrating an interconnectedness in creation.

A select use of visual art is also included, such as the slideshow of photographs on the accompanying DVD that I hope you will have already seen (if not, please take the time to do so now). Images can be accessible resources for inquiry. The use of images can provide a memorable device to enable witnesses to engage with elements of research in a different way (Weber, 2008). They can capture an empathetic understanding of another’s point of view, and communicate multi-layers of experience. Moreover, they can portray aspects of an experience that cannot be articulated linguistically in a powerful manner (Eisner, 2008). Whether created or found, images can provide powerful tools for elicitation (Weber, 2008).

You may notice that I have not provided a commentary on the purpose of the inclusion of literature. It would be simple for me to state the meanings I associate with this assortment of quotes, to explicitly state the intention associated with their inclusion.

But you may not make these same connections and telling you to understand would remove the discovery component that I feel is an essential feature of my project. Instead of providing answers, I have chosen to allow flexibility in understanding, to enable the specific purpose of these selections to be determined by you. I would encourage you to make your own connections between the Alice stories, my narratives, and this dissertation as a whole.

If you haven't yet looked, please find the DVD that is meant to accompany this project. I encourage you to take what time you feel you need, if any, between listening to the vignettes and music as they arise within this document (these are clearly indicated) and as you continue to read further sections of the dissertation. Alternatively, though my goal has been to weave the material that could be considered as 'data' throughout the project to provide a holistic and enduring sense of experience, feel free to separate the listening of vignettes and music from the reading of the text if that feels more appropriate for you, though please still take some time to listen as these facets of self and experience are inherent to my process of meaning making.

From my perspective, the use of varied media can help not only the researcher but also the witness to interpret life with greater sensitivity and in imaginative ways. The inclusion of art allows for alternative presentation of findings while enabling innovative ways of knowing, where artistic expression and appreciation supports transformation (Higgs, 2008). The purpose of the inclusion of interwoven methods of evocation is to enable us to 'see' differently (Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, Donald, Hurren, Leggo, & Oberg, 2008). It has been my goal to create a garden for the senses, to create an ensemble of human experience. Overall, I am seeking to present a different way of

knowing about the topic of filial bereavement, to allow you to enter and experience for yourself how I have attempted to make meaning after losing my dad.

Prior to engaging in this research there was some expressed concern for the potential impact my own voice may have on me, and possible outcomes of coming face to face with my selves within my pain. In fact, throughout this project the message from external others for the need for ongoing self-care has been as repetitive as a parrot asking for crackers and so I have tried to ensure that I have taken necessary precautions. Counselling, journaling, meditation, and ‘earthing’ among many and diverse suggestions have all found their way into my holistic health program in anticipation/fear of the possibility of reliving the tragedy through hearing, analyzing, and what is essentially my diving into the depths of emotion held within my own stories. Initially my researcher self was more concerned with how to do justice to the stories, to present them in a manner that would be both academically sound and rigorous yet true to the experience, though I did hold some concern that I would be prevented from experiencing the rawness and emotion I had hoped to provide for those who would witness this account. My fear proved unfounded and I have come to appreciate the level of concern expressed by external others and the subsequent care plan I had initiated prior to engaging in this research. The process of investigation and writing down my stories has changed me as researcher, as storyteller, and as a person.

In line with ethical considerations for myself, I have also considered what it means to evoke the ‘ghost’ of my father and the dilemmas associated with this form of research generation. Where are the boundaries between public and private? How can I explore myself within my experience of the life and loss of my father while preventing

my research from becoming simply a melancholic elegy? Or, alternatively, a sort of circus where I place my father in the spotlight as a spectacle, a violation of his privacy, and he unable to give consent? What authority do I have to tell a story that is not my own, no matter how inextricably linked it is to who I am? There is the necessity for honesty in this kind of work that could be conceived of as an act of betrayal, but, as it has been noted, without such disclosure, there would be no memoirs (Miller, 1996). But does that make it ok?

I don't know if I'm reassured to discover a history and tradition within bereavement literature of writers who experience this split, but who are also able to do 'justice' to the story of the dead. It has not lessened my own fears that I may have in some way dishonoured my father through my presentation of my loss, while my stories incorporate aspects of what was a less than perfect relationship between two less than perfect people. However, my pursuit has been to explore my own experiences, the development of meaning and understanding for myself within my loss. My goal has been to provide an account that, to me, after the fact, feels authentic, to invoke an "artistic sense of narrative truth" (Miller, 1996, p.14) ultimately to be reformulated by those who witness the account. Regardless, concerns that have arisen from conceptualization of the project highlight the need to hold in mind the ethics of this research (see *Wandering in the Wood of Research Ethics*).

As I have mentioned, I interweave artistic representation with more academic discourse. Throughout this dissertation you will find dissertation chapters interspersed with narrative interludes. In fact, while I have begun this first chapter, 'Down the Rabbit Hole', with a brief introduction to this project entitled 'Welcome to Wonderland, an

Introduction’, what follows is a narrative entitled ‘*Down the Rabbit Hole or ‘In the Beginning’*’. This first narrative offers a brief presentation of how I learned of my father’s death.

The second chapter, ‘Alice’s Evidence’ provides further details surrounding my methodological choices. It begins with the section “‘Curiouser and Curiouser’ – an Exploration of Autoethnography’. In addition to a commentary on my research history and the path I have taken to reach an autoethnographic research process, this section provides an examination of autoethnography as a methodology, while touching on its use within the field of psychotherapy and in the study of bereavement. This discussion is a continuation of the methodology summary provided earlier in this introduction.

‘*Backwards Working Memory*’, is a narrative exploration of my discovery of lessons that have been revealed through examination of my relationship with my dad in the wake of his passing. This narrative is followed by ‘Learning to Draw Treacle (or Arts-Inspired Research)’, wherein I address questions such as ‘What is arts-inspired research?’ and ‘How can artistic mediums be utilized within research?’

The third chapter in this dissertation, ‘A Looking Glass World’, has a focus on bereavement. First, ‘*A Pool of Tears*’ offers a narrative of grief followed by ‘Who Do We Grieve For?’, a section which provides an exploration of general bereavement literature as well as a brief exploration of autoethnographic bereavement studies. This section also includes an examination of grief associated with the process of mourning, not only as a result of bereavement but also grief associated with life choices, consequences, and loss. I continue this chapter with the narrative, ‘*Who in the World Am I?*’, and “‘One Side Will Make You Grow Taller’ – Exploration of Identity’, both of

which discuss the potential impact of bereavement on my identity while also addressing potential implications of loss for my future. Within the section ‘‘Have I Gone Mad?’ Bereavement and Therapy’ I briefly explore the existent literature concerning bereavement loss and therapy, as well as exploring my own experience of bereavement therapy, both as a client and as a practitioner. I conclude this chapter with ‘*An Un-Birthday Celebration*’, a narrative that explores the impact of my father’s death on my current views of celebratory events and activities.

Chapter four, ‘Advice from a Caterpillar’, includes ‘What Does it all Mean?’ which is an exploration of my process of meaning making in the face of bereavement. This section is followed by the narrative ‘*Beware the Jabberwock*’ and a section entitled ‘Painting the Roses Red’ which offers a look into an experience of facing mortality, my own as well as the mortality of those individuals who are most important to me, followed by an exploration of the concept of my own death, my perspective of this inevitability, as well as the potential impact on others. I conclude this section considering my mortality and how this concept has impacted my view of the future.

In Chapter five, ‘Sentence First, Verdict After’, I continue from the brief overview provided in the introduction with the section entitled ‘Wandering in the Wood of Research Ethics’, where I explore potential ethical implications of conducting this research for myself, for my father, for other individuals impacted by this bereavement, as well as potential ethical considerations for witnesses.

What follows in Chapter six, ‘Uncommon Nonsense’ is a trilogy of narratives created to highlight a particular process within my meaning making experience. In the narrative ‘*A Wasp in the Wig, an Exploration of Rage*’ I offer my exploration of rage and

bereavement. *‘Conversations in the Dark’* is a poetic representation of my perception of the multiplicity of selves that collectively represented my father. And finally, while I have previously admitted to confusion regarding aspects of my father’s personality and choices he made, within the narrative *‘Forgiveness, ‘We’re All Mad Here’* I describe an experience of a workshop that helped me to move past confusion and anger, to experience a greater sense of forgiveness. I conclude this chapter with the section entitled *‘The Myth of Closure (Nothing but a Pack of Cards)’*. Herein I propose that closure is not possible, but suggest instead that loss can become assimilated, that it can be a source of learning and growth. I discuss how my mourning process has helped me to see more clearly not only what I desire for my future, but how it has also helped me to gain a greater understanding of my past.

Chapter seven, *‘Directed in the Right Direction Directly’*, includes the section *‘Data Analysis, a Great Puzzle’* which provides an analysis and discussion of alternative data utilized within arts-inspired autoethnographic research.

Within the eighth and final chapter, *‘How Late It’s Getting’* I hold a more questioning outlook where through the use of a narrative developed from an entry in my personal journal, *‘O Frabjous Day’*, followed by the section *‘I’m Through with White Rabbits’* I introduce and explore the concept of spirituality within my bereavement experience.

I have chosen to close this dissertation with a final musical selection meant to accompany a visual expression of mourning the loss of my father.

*The White Rabbit put on his spectacles. "Where shall I begin, please, your Majesty?" he asked.*  
*"Begin at the beginning," the King said gravely, "and go on till you come to the end: then stop."*

*~ Alice in Wonderland, p.197*

*Winter – Tori Amos (Track 1)*

*Snow can wait  
I forgot my mittens  
Wipe my nose  
Get my new boots on  
I get a little warm in my heart  
When I think of winter  
I put my hand in my father's glove  
I run off  
Where the drifts get deeper  
Sleeping beauty trips me with a frown  
I hear a voice:  
"You must learn to stand up  
For yourself  
Cause I can't always be around"*

*He says  
When you gonna make up your mind  
When you gonna love you as much as I  
do  
When you gonna make up your mind  
Cause things are gonna change so fast  
All the white horses are still in bed  
I tell you that I'll always want you near  
You say that things change, my dear*

*Boys get discovered as winter melts  
Flowers competing for the sun  
Years go by and I'm here still waiting  
Withering where some snowman was  
Mirror, mirror where's the crystal  
palace  
But I only can see myself  
Skating around the truth  
Who I am  
But I know dad, the ice is getting thin*

*When you gonna make up your mind  
When you gonna love you as much as I  
do  
When you gonna make up your mind  
Cause things are gonna change so fast  
All the white horses are still in bed  
I tell you that I'll always want you near  
You say that things change, my dear*

*Hair is grey  
And the fires are burning  
So many dreams  
On the shelf  
You say I wanted you to be proud of me  
I always wanted that myself*

*When you gonna make up your mind  
When you gonna love you as much as I  
do  
When you gonna make up your mind  
Cause things are gonna change so fast  
All the white horses have gone ahead  
I tell you that I'll always want you near  
You say that things change  
My dear  
Never change  
All the white horses...*

*Down the Rabbit Hole or 'The Beginning' (Track 2)*

*In 2001 while crossing the street on a late December evening, my dad was struck down by a vehicle driven by an uninsured motorist. My dad suffered multiple fractures, a closed head injury and had to be kept in the hospital for a lengthy period to recover. This was the start of his decline in health.*

*No one can be prepared to receive a call to rush to the emergency room.*

*It was the morning after the accident. I remember it vividly and, oddly, as if it all happened in slow motion. I had just perfected my skill at making omelets. It was a casual Sunday morning and I was making my then boyfriend breakfast. I was 21.*

*No one can be prepared to receive a call to rush to the emergency room, and no one can prepare themselves for the sight of someone they love after they've been hit by a car. It has taken me years to not feel sick at the thought of eating omelets.*

*My dad's health waxed and waned over the ensuing years. Some days were worse than others, but while he was never again able to walk freely and was in a constant state of pain, there were periods of time where we thought he was actually doing 'well'. It was during one such period in 2009 that I travelled to Ireland. I was only to be gone for seven days. Dad had gone into the hospital the week before I left for some more tests. He was always going for tests it seemed, so, for all intents and purposes, this was a minor visit for him. He asked me to bring back some Irish whiskey. I wasn't worried when I left.*

*My first day in Dublin, I picked up postcards to send to my family. Although I knew I'd get back to Canada faster than the postal service could deliver them, the point was to let my family know that I was thinking of them while away, even if the message arrived belatedly.*

*I had only been in Ireland for two full days when I received the call. My mom's voice sounded odd. Distant and formal. Immediately I thought I was getting in trouble for something. I wish I had been.*

*Randall Matthew Sehn passed away unexpectedly on April 4, 2009 alone in the hospital.*

*While he had been suffering from a number of illnesses, as per usual for him, we still don't know how he died.*

*My postcard to him arrived two days after his wake.*

*No Help For That – Charles Bukowski*

*there is a place in the heart that  
will never be filled*

*a space*

*and even during the  
best moments  
and  
the greatest times  
times*

*we will know it*

*we will know it  
more than ever*

*there is a place in the heart that  
will never be filled*

*and*

*we will wait  
and  
wait  
in that space*



**Chapter 2**  
**Alice's Evidence**

*“Always speak the truth – think before you speak – and write it down afterwards.”*

*~ Alice Through the Looking Glass, p.191*

*'Curiouser and Curiouser' - an Exploration of Autoethnography*

While my bereavement experience could be equated to falling down a rabbit hole into a world that feels completely changed and yet somehow recognizable, my venture into autoethnographic research has also been a journey into a new and unknown realm throughout this dissertation. I have struggled occasionally to assimilate new ways as my earlier learning has been ingrained, and the difference of the new can yet seem bewildering, strange, and even sometimes frightening. However, travelling through this newly discovered research territory feels to be the natural next step or progression in my development as a researcher. Within this section I will detail my journey through the research landscape and how I have found myself in the realm of autoethnography, while also detailing what distinguishes autoethnographic methodology, providing examples of autoethnographic research, and what has drawn me to engage in this form of research for my explorations into my bereavement experience.

I began my education under what I would consider strict positivistic paradigmatic rules, quite typical of undergraduate education in psychology (Higgs, 2008). Quantitative research that followed the scientific method of utilizing rigid techniques to create generalizable data was viewed as the gold standard, with studies that produced correlational findings perceived as slightly less valuable than data that could be tested rigorously through advanced statistical analysis. Case studies were only mentioned in hushed tones of embarrassment that such research had ever been conducted within the field of psychology. This form of research was described as nearly useless and something to avoid, a throwback to early, less academic days. In spite of numerous classes on various research methods, including several mandatory advanced

courses on statistics utilized in psychological research, it was only in the final year of my undergraduate degree while taking the single clinical psychology class offered by my university at that time that I was offered a fleeting glimpse of something called 'Qualitative Research'. These types of research studies explored topics in greater depth. I was intrigued and wanted to learn more. However, this tradition was still viewed as 'soft' and not to be undertaken by 'serious' researchers or by those who wished to pursue a career in academia. Regardless, I applied and was accepted into a Master's Degree program with a qualitative focus.

It was during my Master's program that I began to explore the lay of the land outside the boundaries of quantitative research. I began to understand the importance of depth. I learned how to interview to enable my participants to expand their answers beyond the options available within a survey, to encourage the emergence of their stories. I started to go deeper.

Learning about various qualitative methodologies during my Master's degree sent my neurons firing like eureka flashbulbs throughout my brain. With the goal of becoming a therapist, I had chosen to go into a field to work with individuals, to hear their stories. These methodologies supported exploring the uniqueness of different voices. And yet, within my Master's research, while I was able to capture a greater sense of an experience, to include the rich description provided by my participants, my chosen methodology seemed to necessitate the conversion of these stories into a positivistic production. The outcome was a generalization across participant experiences, and somehow the individuality of the voices was lost in spite of the depth. There had to be something more.

My researcher self is intrigued by the concept of autoethnography and the opportunity to explore my own experience in depth. Autoethnography requires the researcher to focus on a question that has deep personal significance and may involve creative representation. My own proposed research stems from my internal, unobservable world that I believe is beyond a survey of surface experience and so would be inaccessible from a quantitative approach. Qualitative research also has the advantage of being more easily accessible to those without a strong research background while also enabling you who witness my account, whether bereaved or not, to each determine for yourself whether there is a connection between aspects of my story with your own experience (see Dallos & Vetere, 2005; Patton, 2002). In addition, as my particular area of interest surrounds the abstract idea of life meaning and is not an attempt to test or validate a specific concept or theory, conducting qualitative research feels most suitable. I agree with Dallos and Vetere when they argue that examining aspects of human lives and emotions from a fixed position that ignores the rationale behind behaviour results in a limited view that cannot truly understand the multi-faceted nature of humanity, no matter how rigorous the testing may be (2005). Reflexivity within the process eliminates the perceived need of positivistic research to remain objective and distant (de Freitas, 2008). Through uncovering the layers and dimensions of my mourning process, I can contribute to knowledge of bereavement therapy and, hopefully, help others to gain a better understanding of their own heartache.

It is also important that I address the 'ethno' or cultural aspect of autoethnography, beyond the cultural influence of my academic training. While my story

is viewed as a valid source of information, it is important that I situate my story as it is both influenced by and embedded within my cultural context.

I am a Canadian woman, born and raised in a valley in central British Columbia. Both of my parents were Canadian, my father born and raised in the same city as me, though both my parents had strong ties to the area. I could undoubtedly write a dissertation solely on the cultural context of my upbringing, such as the importance to me of being able to choose to be educated in both national languages and the availability of a French Immersion academic system, the opportunities for extracurricular activities and learning outside of the home and school, the availability of nature and open space. Of particular relevance to the stories within this project is the publicly funded health care system throughout the country, which means that everyone can have access to most forms of health care, no matter their economic circumstances (for further information see Minister of Justice, Canada Health Act, 1985).

When I think of my being Canadian I think of these opportunities and I feel fortunate. However, I then reflect on whether these aspects I hold as being an essential part of Canadian culture actually belong within the culture of my community, school, and/or family of origin. Simply being born in Canada does not mean that these opportunities will be utilized. Yes, the opportunities were available to me because of the country in which I was born, but they were appreciated and made use of as a result of the influence of those individuals involved in raising me, and, as I have grown older, through my own choices. In addition, regardless of being Canadian, socioeconomic status could have been a barrier to my development and financial challenges could have differently influenced who I am and have been. In spite of my experience and awareness

of financial challenges growing up, because of the values and choices of those surrounding me throughout my life, specifically my mom, I feel my upbringing was rich with experience regardless of a lack of financial wealth. I am Canadian and am proud to say so. I am happy to show the rest of the world that I come from what I perceive to be a great country, and I adorn my travel gear with Canadian flags. But I must also give credit to the influence of more micro levels of culture, such as positive experiences in my community, school, and, most importantly, my family.

The further away I travel from home, I find I am challenged to speak to others about my cultural context as a Canadian and I admit it can be an effort to avoid making sweeping generalizations of what it means to belong to this population. I have been challenged to differentiate being Canadian from being North American and have sometimes struggled in my efforts to illustrate that these cultures can be both separate and the same. Being Canadian to me means being proud of many of the stereotypical views of us as peace makers and pacifists, and sharing my endorsement for Canadian politics that support health care and education for everyone, while sometimes simply having to laugh while disabusing people of cultural fallacies, such as the notion that I live in an igloo and use a team of huskies to guide my dog sled to work. These things, among many and diverse characteristics of Canada as a nation, are unique qualities I associate with being Canadian. And yet there are times where I cannot distinguish being Canadian from an overarching North American culture. For example, and of specific relevance to my dissertation, Canadian musicians, comedians, actors, and artists of all kinds often travel south of our border to seek opportunities, and are often misperceived as being from the United States. In turn, agencies outside of Canada will often work with

Canadian companies and artists. From my perspective there is a blending of cultures across North America with regards to the arts that can be difficult to distinguish, at least at a general level such as what I am presenting here, but this blending of artistic endeavors creates a more dynamic culture shared across borders.

I acknowledge the importance of addressing context broadly, to include the ‘ethno’ aspect of autoethnographic research within my study. However, I also see the potential for issues that could arise should the overarching context be overly emphasized beyond the context of the individual. The problem that I perceive is that while the context of what I am presenting to you is that of a bereaved adult child, a Canadian woman, I feel that I cannot speak for all Canadians in the same manner that I cannot speak for all women. So too I cannot speak for all bereaved daughters. I can only speak for myself and illustrate that my perception of my context has played a role, whether overtly or unconsciously, in my bereavement experience and my process of making meaning within my grief.

As I mentioned earlier, exploring autoethnographic methodology feels like the next step for me as a researcher. And yet, I am attempting to divest myself of deep rooted learning. I still feel the pull of that positivistic question, ‘How is this research?’ (Knowles & Promislow, 2008; Wyatt, 2007). I am still drawn to the empiricism of my early academic life, the need for my research to ‘fill a gap’ in order to be considered at all worthwhile. I experience a sense of shame as I admit my lingering doubts, feeling that I should be beyond this. In some ways, I feel as though I have been pulled in two different directions simultaneously throughout this project, not only between my past learning and my current goals, but also as a result of external pressures. From my

perspective, there is somewhat of a contradiction between the research traditions of my counselling department and the university at large. There are certain institution-wide requirements for the dissertation process that seem to fit more readily within positivistic delineations, while within my department and for my project I am supported in the process and judged on my ability to demonstrate my capability to conduct qualitative case study research. However, the implication within both the institution and the department has been that worthy research is research that provides ‘something more’ than has come before or that examines a topic that has yet to be explored. The scientific method is still hovering on the sidelines of my project. In contrast, my chosen methodology supports an emergent research perspective (Chambers et al., 2008). This internal struggle has been ongoing and has occasionally bubbled to the surface within this study. My autoethnographic researcher self is still discovering her strengths in the process of accepting that the work itself can provide an “adequate expression of meaning” (Higgs, 2008, p.551).

In spite of the struggle of my researcher self, as my therapist self, I feel a connection with the concept of conducting autoethnographic research. Due to the strong link between autoethnography and narrative, this qualitative methodology has been found to work well for research in the field of psychotherapy as it enables the witness to enter the experience themselves and personally construct the meaning therein (McLeod, 2011). For me, this form of inquiry has a sense of validity to client work, where a unique story and constellation of emotions emerges throughout therapy. Autoethnographic research also values the importance of individuals’ stories (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008). Both therapy and autoethnography involve the creation and support of connections

between people, between painful events, and, hopefully, result in a form of integration (Flemons & Green, 2002d).

I also find the underlying humanity of such case studies appealing. By humanity I refer to the opportunity to examine an event or experience in its real world context in relation to additional individual features of those involved, such as relationships, culture, and community. I appreciate that this allows for the exploration of the process of clinical change, while also acknowledging the full complexity of the individual case (Aveline, 2005). To me, the individual nature of autoethnography, the counselling relationship, as well as the individual nature of bereavement experiences, indicates the importance of context. My experience of making meaning has been influenced by a multitude of personal elements which fits with the philosophical emphasis of individual experience that underpins case study research (Dallos & Vetere, 2005). In turn, therapeutic approaches that honour the uniqueness of the individual supports the use of case study research (Bryant-Jeffries, 2006). Sensitive support involves working with client's individual experiences, which in turn highlights the need to focus on individual cases as opposed to conducting large-scale research projects with the aim of generalization (Buglass, 2010). The employment of qualitative epistemological models fits with social science disciplines that include the person-centered and psychodynamic perspectives such as the dialogue emphasized within my counselling department (Higgs, 2008).

Any counsel worthy of the name should begin to make a place in personal life for the rumoured, scattered story of who you come from, where, and why. Counsel well done and honest makes a home for the orphan wisdom of personal life in the life of the world. (Jenkinson, 2013)

So too can the process of autoethnographic inquiry itself be therapeutic (Flemons & Green, 2002c). While my goal with this research has not been to engage with it as personal therapy, I have chosen to explore my bereavement through my own narrative to generate and provide rich descriptions of events and experiences that are personally meaningful. Taking all of these connections into consideration, from my perspective there seems to be an inherent relationship between therapy and case study research.

As I have said, I am new to autoethnography, where the entire research process is inquiry (Flemons & Green, 2002a). My journey has involved learning not only to accept but also to embrace that the purpose of such research is for me to utilize my own voice in the creation of an autobiographical narrative that examines my own experience and my internal world in conjunction with the culture in which I am embedded (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008). I am not only the researcher I am the researched. In essence, I *am* 'The Research'.

I will admit that I am feeling somewhat nervous in my self-exposure. I feel that there is a sort of tightrope that autoethnographic researchers must walk. There are various risks associated with conducting this form of research, risks that may only be determined by where the researcher is situated within the research and herself (Wyatt, 2007). On one hand, there are personal and professional risks involved through this process of 'outing' the self (Flemons & Green, 2002c), while, on the other hand, there is also a concern that composing and presenting narratives of the self may become self-indulgent (Sparks, 2002) as autoethnographic research has sometimes been criticized as being overly subjective (Crotty, 1998). However, there is a difference between engaging in this form of research as confession versus enabling a presentation of testimony. While

confession is done for the self, testimony involves someone presenting her story as an example that has “relevance beyond the self” (Flemons & Green, 2002c, p.169).

According to an autoethnographic conversation reproduced by Flemons and Green, it is important to be able to look beyond the scope of researcher egocentricity in an attempt to produce insightful research that contributes to knowledge, where the researcher utilizes her preconceptions while also moving towards the development and advancement of understanding (2002b). When done mindfully, it seems that the presence of the researcher is not a limitation in autoethnographic research (Cooper, 2008). In fact, this shift in methodology is what enabled me a sense of freedom and insight into myself.

To do autoethnography is to be a witness to one’s self. Writing autoethnography gives one the opportunity to tell one’s story – over and over again, to see it on the computer screen, to alter it, delete it, over and over again, altering one’s sense of self, because one is reading about a newly emergent self, changing on the screen before one’s very eyes. One witnesses again and again one’s life, not as a foretold story, but as an evolving one – evolving the writer/witness as well, creating a more complex person. (Richardson, 2013, p.25)

As I have experienced, autoethnographic research can go deep within to touch the spiritual and can incorporate both the cognitive and the emotional aspects of the self (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008). The demands of self-analysis within autoethnographic exploration and the need to maintain an authentic voice, as well as the need to develop diverse competencies, mean that quality autoethnographic research can be difficult to conduct (Eisner, 2008; Patton, 2002). My question for myself then has been how do I

ensure that I maintain my balance while traversing my own emotion and process? “You start from a point and you don’t know where you’re going. You play with the story, you go with the story to see where you end up” (Flemons & Green, 2002a, p.92). Ultimately, the safety of the ledge at the other side of this tightrope is shrouded in fog, and for me it feels that my ability to put one foot in front of the other is based on faith. How many times have I heard my tutors tell me to ‘trust the process’? A familiar tune.

Stories “are who we are, who we have been, and who we will become” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p.56). Narrative case studies offer insight into an individual’s unique experience while providing a holistic sense of what happened (Dallos & Vetere, 2005). However, autoethnographic research is not merely retelling a life story. The goal is to enable the witness to experience intimately that which the researcher has experienced (McLeod, 2011). Narrative analysis explores a life story using the voice of the individual who has lived it, and examines how this story can shape the sense of self and identity over time (Dallos & Vetere, 2005; Patton, 2002). In the case of my research, it is my goal to use my voice to provide you as witness access to my experience, to allow you to get inside my head and heart, and ultimately allow you and each of my witnesses to construct your own meaning and interpretation of the story. Such has been my experience as a witness of autoethnographic research produced by others. The depth of understanding that I have been afforded through the opportunity to be involved in the intimate aspects of another’s experience has, for me, further promoted the use of autoethnographic methodology in delving into experience and personal meaning.

While exploring bereavement literature I gathered a stack of journal articles for my morning read. The order was random and it was purely accidental that the first

journal selected was a quantitative survey, the second a grounded theory, and the third an autoethnography. Through these three articles I was able to observe a progression that highlighted the differences in methodologies and supported my own choice of autoethnography for my dissertation. The first article provided some interesting, though dry, statistics on bereavement. But trailing behind the final page lay a question I couldn't shake, 'What about the actual experience?' While many of the variables associated with both the affective qualities and expression of grief have been uncovered through quantitative research, these studies fail to provide any indication of how and why these emotions and behaviours occur (Parkes, 2006). As I have mentioned, an important strength associated with qualitative research is the ability to provide depth and detail through rich description that cannot be gained through quantitative research (Cooper, 2008; Patton, 2002). However, after reading the grounded theory study, a qualitative article, I questioned the choice to amalgamate the experiences of so many diverse people. Yes, the authors were able to provide increased depth, but my concluding wonderment was 'What has been lost by removing the individuality of the experience?' When I turned to the autoethnographic piece, I felt a connection. The depth of the research fit for me as a witness. "Hearing the stories of bereaved individuals in their own words can be powerful." (Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2008, p.59). I was drawn into the author's experience, I was moved by her emotion, and I was inspired to tell my own story.

Recently, there has been an increase in the opportunities to utilize new methods of inquiry and a greater range of forms of creative intelligence within research (McNiff, 2008), which has provided support for me throughout the process of completing my non-

traditional research project. Emotional learning has begun to be valued as equal to scientific understanding (Kerry-Moran, 2008). One statement that I have heard repeated within numerous journal articles is that autoethnographic research is both art and science and then something more (e.g., Jipson & Paley, 2008; Kerry-Moran, 2008; Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008), the line between not easy to discern (Barone, 2008a). Interestingly, Bowlby states that psychotherapy also involves both art and science (1988). Whether in the form of formal academic research or within a therapeutic frame, both art and science involve a form of experimentation with a goal of developing an understanding about life, and the use of artistic renderings demonstrates the perceived value for the potential for variation and interpretation (McNiff, 2008). Part of my goal within this new tradition has been to learn:

[H]ow to position myself within my research project to show aspects of my own tacit world, challenge my assumptions, locate myself through the eyes of the Other, and observe myself observing. (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008, p.129)

The aim of such research is to cross disciplines to explore previously unknown areas. It has required considerable effort for me to lay my anxiety to rest and accept that from this perspective it is possible for my research to stand alone in value in itself, while also providing new insight.

In spite of this, there appears to be a sliding scale for autoethnographic research that goes between degrees of an art/science ratio, where on one end lays evocative autoethnography, on the other analytic autoethnography. Evocative autoethnography attempts to draw the witness into a story, to feel what the writer feels, while analytic autoethnography attempts to place more emphasis on the final outcome, to bring

autoethnography closer to theory (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Analytic autoethnography can feel closer to a realist ethnographic piece, where the author is less situated within the story and more of an observer discussing fact for the purpose of promoting or developing theoretical understanding. Analytic autoethnography attempts to represent data as opposed to evocative autoethnography, which focuses on meaning, transformation, and the researcher's engagement with the witnesses (Ellis, 2004). While it may seem more appropriate for me to explore analytic autoethnography, given my history and struggle to put away the scientific method, I want to enable the witnesses of my account to enter my experience. As such, I am conducting evocative autoethnography. In addition, I am also including alternative methods of understanding through the use of various artistic formats to further draw you into the emotionality of my experience.

Not surprisingly, when discussing autoethnographic research and arts-inspired research the question arises of what is the difference between these traditions? There is a grey area that lies between these two research traditions. Autoethnographic research has the option of utilizing a variety of art forms, though the inclusion of art is not necessary for a study to qualify as autoethnographic. In addition, arts-based research is likely to focus on the individual artist, though such research doesn't have to be autoethnographic. Research utilizing the arts enables a broader scope of qualitative design (Higgs, 2008) and the power of autoethnographic research to be evocative and promote audience engagement can be increased when it purposefully incorporates alternative methods, such as the arts and literature (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008). Both traditions incorporate researcher subjectivity and presentation of the intimate and emotional, while opening

doors for witnesses to develop their own meanings and perceptions of possibility (Bochner & Ellis, 2003). I would argue that while these are distinct research traditions they can overlap and are able to work in harmony.

For me, I feel that utilizing arts-inspired research in concert with an autoethnographic methodology enables my own needs to be met while also providing the research itself to have the power to evolve according to the needs and interpretations of those who act as witness (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008).

Research

Re: Search

Regarding my Search

I am searching

I am re-searching

My continuous

Ongoing  
Process

to

Understand

to

Re-search  
(re:search)

To become a researcher

A searcher

Of myself

*‘Be what you would seem to be’ – or, if you'd like it put more simply – never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise.*

*~ Alice in Wonderland, p.151*

*Backwards Working Memory (Track 3)*

*I don't think I ever understood who my father was while I was growing up. Not really. Not as a person beyond his role of being 'my dad'. And possibly not even in that role he played in my life. I knew he loved me, that was never in question, but my relationship with him had a significantly different quality to my relationship with my mother, who I have always found to think and feel and live on my wavelength. My father, however, was always somewhat of an enigma.*

*The traditional marital relationship between my parents ended when I was very young. However, unlike some of the stories recounted by my friends, most of whom were raised by their mother in single parent families, I never felt as though there was animosity between my parents. And so, I grew up with parents who lived in separate homes while I lived with my mom. I grew up with parents who I spent quality time with, though not together. And I had the opportunity of having unique celebrations and experiences with both. This, to me, was normal.*

*But my dad often confused me, though I didn't question this when I was still a young child. My dad was who he was, different from other dads, and that was ok. Sometimes. Or at least until I began to develop an awareness of judgment and a greater external locus of evaluation. From then I struggled to accept the person my dad had chosen to be. I struggled with this right until the end of his life. In many ways, I blame him for his death because if he had lived differently, made different choices, been a different man, his end would not have been as it was.*

*When I was young, perhaps 7 or 8 years old, my dad took my brother and I for lunch at McDonalds. This was a special treat and I remember feeling that it was a good day. But at school the next day another child from my class commented that he had seen me with my grandfather. I was confused. That was my dad, I corrected. The boy seemed surprised, and with the tactlessness of youth stated that the man he'd seen me with had to have been my grandfather because he had graying hair. This was when I learned to be embarrassed about my father. That special day became tainted and I began to feel ashamed that my father failed to fit the 'dad' mould.*

*As I grew older, his eccentricities drove me away as I struggled to find a place in what felt to be a harshly judgmental teen society. I still loved my dad, but I found myself separating from him. And yet, my own struggle to be unique, to find myself, was in many ways a reflection of his struggle to be himself, and the need within me to stand out from the crowd was largely influenced, and encouraged, by him. I am still learning to be grateful for this because though at times it may have felt a burden, and occasionally still does, it has also been a gift. But as a teenager it felt impossible to see this lesson as anything but a black mark on my image within a young socialized world. My dad, in many ways, became a skeleton in my closet, someone who just could not fit quite right, someone I couldn't understand.*

*Hypocritically, I loved hanging out with my dad. We almost always had fun together and we laughed often. I felt I could talk to him, that we were friends, though as I got older I often joked that I was more the parent in our relationship. Regardless, right until the end, I was always his little girl, loved above anything. But still, aspects of my dad's personality were beyond my comprehension. And embarrassment of his poverty, his separateness from the 'normal', and confusion about his choices, choices that hurt both of us, made me resentful. Why couldn't I have a 'proper' father?*

*When I was growing up I sometimes would wish I had grown up in that stereotypical 1950s style family akin to *Leave it to Beaver*, where gender roles were entrenched and dad, well, dad was someone opposite to who mine actually was. I determined from a young age that when I grew up I would have the house with the white picket fence, the cat, the dog, the 2.5 children, and the safe and dependable Volvo in the driveway; that I would marry a man who could help me create that idealistic family life. This goal gave me a sense of normalcy; that I could, and would, create for myself that life I wished I'd had.*

*In high school, I had the opportunity of making friends beyond the social circle of my childhood. My high school was the largest and most varied in the district, and I began to learn about other kinds of family systems, one of which fell neatly into my supposed ideal. I was invited one day to come to the home of a girl I was just getting to know. Pulling up to her family's expensive home in their brand new car I felt I was in a*

*different world. I observed the lovely blonde children with their clean-cut charm, wearing their crisp polo shirts of a neutral beige line up in the hallway as they heard Father's car in the drive. Mother hurriedly removed her apron to stand at the door, ready to take Father's coat and briefcase. And I, in my flowing poet's shirt and black leggings, brightly painted nails, crimson colored lips, and loosely hanging auburn-dyed hair, stood awkwardly to meet this Patriarchal figure who commanded such rigid affirmation of his place at the head of the family. Father greeted Mother with a chaste kiss on the cheek, followed by a conservative questioning of the children's day and had they learned much in school? Although introduced, I was hardly acknowledged, a non-entity. The children were ushered upstairs once more to allow Father time to rest. I felt like an anthropologist, maybe like one of my idols Jane Goodall or Dian Fossey, studying a family of chimps or apes; a similar species but so very different.*

*I determined that what was lacking in this interaction was expressions of love, fun, and humour. I couldn't imagine my friend's father taking her for walks through an orchard only to end up climbing through a broken window to explore a long abandoned old house, making up ghost stories along the way. Or sitting for hours on a special camping trip watching tiny tadpoles and talking about the wonder of their development, the awesomeness that one day those tadpoles would turn into frogs. Or looking through a magazine of tattoos and appreciating the artistic value of body art while discussing the origins of tattoos and meanings behind body modification in other and early cultures. Or any number of memories I have of my time with my dad. I never again went to visit this friend, and our interactions at school were friendly, but limited. We both knew we were from different worlds, worlds that at the age of 15 were just too far apart.*

*I understand my desire to fit in. I still struggle with being different. However, I no longer wish for the 'traditional' family as I once did. I think I'd find that boring. And looking back now, if I had to choose, I would much rather have had an unconventional father who would encourage me to nurture the growth of my soul in whatever way I chose, who rejected the notion of being a copy-cat drone, than to have a father uninvolved in helping me become a person and an individual. My father may not have had much to contribute to me financially, he often lost in his struggle with his demons,*

*and more often than not he was not the best role model, but I am able to see the wealth in the lessons I learned from him and I feel fortunate. I wish I could thank him for that.*

*Don't Cry – Guns N' Roses (Track 4)*

*Talk to me softly  
There's something in your eyes  
Don't hang your head in sorrow  
And please don't cry  
I know how you feel inside I've  
I've been there before  
Something is changing inside you  
And don't you know*

*Don't you cry tonight  
I still love you baby  
Don't you cry tonight  
Don't you cry tonight  
There's a heaven above you baby  
And don't you cry tonight*

*Give me a whisper  
And give me a sigh  
Give me a kiss before you  
Tell me goodbye  
Don't you take it so hard now  
And please don't take it so bad  
I'll still be thinking of you  
And the times we had, baby*

*And don't you cry tonight  
Don't you cry tonight  
Don't you cry tonight  
There's a heaven above you baby  
And don't you cry tonight*

*And please remember that I never lied  
And please remember  
How I felt inside now honey  
You gotta make it your own way  
But you'll be alright now sugar  
You'll feel better tomorrow  
Come the morning light now baby*

*And don't you cry tonight  
And don't you cry tonight  
And don't you cry tonight  
There's a heaven above you baby  
And don't you cry  
Don't you ever cry  
Don't you cry tonight*

*Baby maybe someday*

*Don't you cry  
Don't you ever cry  
Don't you cry  
Tonight*

*Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, “and what is the use of a book,” thought Alice, “without pictures or conversations?”*

*~ Alice in Wonderland, p.11*

*Learning to Draw Treacle (or Arts-Inspired Research)*

In spite of the overlap between autoethnographic and arts-inspired research, these two traditions have unique characteristics. What follows is a discussion of the importance of art to me throughout my life as well as my attempt to fit together the pieces of arts-inspired research relevant to this project with the previously presented autoethnographic aspects to reveal the outlines of a whole.

I credit my mother with instilling in me a love of the arts. As a young child, instead of being placed in front of a television, I was given crayons and pencils, a box of costumes, and books. I was encouraged to create stories, to illustrate them, to perform, to imagine. In my youth, I was a dancer, exploring modern ways of conveying emotion through physical expression. In high school, I filled my world with artistic renderings, discovering the power of paint and pencil. At university, I explored creative writing, allowing my imagination to play with language. Not only did I publish poetry, but I also helped to edit the final production of a number of university produced creative writing anthologies. I have been a novelist. I have been a singer. I have been an actor. I have been an artist. Throughout my life, my creativity has been nourished by creative souls. Unfortunately, I am also a practical person and surrounded by creative people, I have seen the difficulties associated with following a creative dream. Instead of a career in the arts, in film, on stage, as a dancer, as a musician or painter, I chose to spend my entire adult life so far learning to help others. I have often wondered if this was a mistake, that I would have felt a greater sense of fulfillment within myself if I had pursued a creative path. And though I get a different sort of satisfaction from my work as a therapist, I believe that creativity can be found anywhere, as long as it is looked for.

As an adult and a professional, the desire to be creative has not vanished, though I have felt its censorship within academic boundaries. However, this has not meant that art, as a broad term, has vanished from my professional life. As a therapist, I have positioned myself to be able to utilize the creative arts within my practice. I offer my clients the opportunity to incorporate visual art, such as painting, drawing, and photography, as well as poetry, prose, and music into the therapeutic frame. I have also worked with therapeutic groups where we have constructed experience in theatrical form.

Because there are no fixed truths, no final judgment can be made, and the therapeutic environment is enhanced. Clients are encouraged to find or create their own solutions. Growth potential is enhanced. Adaptation is piqued, and the generative spirit is given free reign. (Higgs, 2008, p.554)

While I am not engaging with my own creativity directly within this process, allowing others to share their stories in alternative ways feeds a need within my own creative core, and provides a deeper sense of fulfillment for me within the work. Ironically, in spite of the importance of the arts to me as a person and as a therapist, given my history of positivistic academic training it did not occur to me until I began my dissertation that the arts could also be a source of depth within my research.

It is one thing to share my story, to be honest and true to my experience, it is another to elaborate with an explanation that fits within conventional research boundaries (Cole & Knowles, 2008). However, the flexibility of autoethnography enables the incorporation of art as research that allows people to go beyond the traditional, to conduct research in a different way (Bochner & Ellis, 1996). Much like

the process described by Cole and Knowles (2008), the introduction of arts within my sphere of research understanding was exciting, as was the possibility of pushing against a boundary that had entrapped me throughout my academic life to date. Instead of what I perceived to be a stale quantitative (or even qualitative!) approach that sucked the life-force from my story, here I had an opportunity to stick my head, my hands, my heart, my soul into the painful, shitty, beautiful, and enigmatic experience of my grief, and to smear the colours of experience onto a page as a valid form of social science inquiry. Much like my own initial fears of retribution for challenging conventional research methods, perhaps the greatest challenge faced by researchers within these frameworks may be the struggle against the dominance of the conventional views held within traditional empirical research traditions (Knowles & Promislow, 2008) as arts-inspired research has only recently begun to be included in mainstream research (Kerry-Moran, 2008). However, in spite of my own tentative first steps this use of an 'alternative' form of qualitative inquiry felt immediately natural to me and in line with my eccentricities, which I have often held in reserve within an academic community. I have since come to feel that the gilded cage of the scientific method, which previously controlled my research explorations, has been removed, and I can stretch my wings to explore new places.

To become a researcher who fuses the arts into research processes and representations is to possess a creativity and artfulness. It is to have a willingness to be creative and to not be bounded by traditions of academic discourse and research processes but, rather, to be grounded in them. (Knowles & Promislow, 2008, p.519)

While literature on arts-informed research has only recently begun to emerge, I have been amazed at the amount and quality of research in this area that is currently being produced. From this literature, I have been able to learn that arts-informed research is qualitative academic inquiry that incorporates, and is influenced by, the arts in order to enhance the representation and understanding of human experience (Childs, 2004; Cole & Knowles, 2008; Tidwell & Tincu, 2004). “Creativity is at the heart of the enterprise” (Knowles & Promislow, 2008, p.519). Knowles and Promislow describe it as an enmeshment of academics and the arts that may include literary, visual, or performance art process, representations, and forms, or combinations thereof (2008). Such research is an infusion of art that can contribute to the research process and product. According to Childs, the combination of genres within research provides an interpretive framework to aid in theorizing an experience while breaking down boundaries to communication and understanding (2004). In addition, artistic mediums may provide a sensitivity and flexibility to capture the shades of experience and aid the researcher in finding her voice (Childs, 2004), while also providing a window through which meaning of narrative text can be better understood (Tidwell & Tincu, 2004). My own questions of how to communicate my experience effectively seem to be answered within the framework of arts-inspired research. “To conduct research infused by the arts is to break out of the conventional” (Knowles & Promislow, 2008, p.518).

To break with convention, a novel idea within my academic life, but one that fits with my ‘self’ as I exist outside of the boundaries established by institution or regulation. But that self cannot be completely segregated from the self who acts within those boundaries. I am the research/er/ed. I am a participant within my own world, and

as described by Scott-Hoy and Ellis, “I need to come to grips with my experience as an involved and situated researcher who is an integral part of the research and writing process” (2008, p.128). I cannot ignore who I am within myself and within my research, as who I am will contribute to the depth and quality of that research. In addition to the reflexive nature of qualitative research where the researcher is the instrument, in the case of arts-informed inquiry, the researcher is also an artist, whether through aesthetic production or simply through aesthetic conceptualization, and the artistic signature of the researcher is likely to be highly evident. The distinguishing features of the product of arts-inspired research can be reflected in the unique aspects of the researcher herself (Knowles & Promislow, 2008). And as I have said before, I have many selves.

Arts reflect the dynamic self of the artist and the artist’s perspective on experience. They are a personal expression of an understanding of the world, and they evoke the distilled experience of being in the world of the individual. As researchers, artists are attuned to the self-knowing reflective practice. The artist as researcher creates meaning. (Higgs, 2008, p.551)

It seems that my goal to engage in a deeper exploration of the self and process of identity/self-development within my research can be supported through the use of artistic mediums (Childs, 2004), which may also help me to communicate what I discover within and from this process in an alternative manner (Cole & Knowles, 2008). According to Scott-Hoy and Ellis, positioning research in such a way enables dissemination and accessibility of the research to a broad and diverse audience who can benefit from exploring their own lives through learning about the experiences of others (2008). Although I am engaged with you in your engagement with this project, I don’t

know much about you or anyone else who may decide to join us on this journey. One aspect of artistically represented projects that I find appealing, however, is that they can engage witnesses from different fields within academia as well as having the potential to engage witnesses from the general public (Barone, 2008b). Knowles and Promislow also advocate for the benefits of such research to encourage and strengthen further development of the use of arts-related methodologies in research (2008). It appears that researchers in this area are redefining the form, process, and purpose of research, while also enabling the inclusion of a deeper level of emotion, spirit, and understanding of human experience.

One of the overarching messages throughout the literature on arts-inspired research is that the change in research form is, essentially, a change in epistemology, or the way in which we as researchers ‘know’ (see Childs, 2004; Cole & Knowles, 2008; Knowles & Promislow, 2008; Tidwell & Tincu, 2004). Cole and Knowles highlight that part of the changing epistemology is based on arts-informed research branching away from standard practice to recognize that individuals can both produce and advance knowledge (2008). It would seem that the positivist view of knowledge as generated, defined, and controlled by research does not fit within an arts-informed paradigm, where knowledge derived from personal experience is recognized as valuable (Childs, 2004).

To me it seems that there is the potential for a deep connection between the artist as researcher and the therapist as researcher, both of whom engage in thoughtful self-analysis. Research that focuses on the knowledge inherent within each individual fits well within the confines of counselling and psychotherapy where we as practitioners are encouraged to work with the story presented by each individual client. If our clinical

work holds such a personalized focus where generalizations are avoided, perhaps our research would benefit from explorations of the uniqueness of the individual. There is also an inherent artistic quality to therapy, as work with clients can often involve the use of narrative, metaphor, and reflection, as well as tools that may incorporate artistic expression (Higgs, 2008). Furthermore, there is art in holding a therapeutic frame to enable another to peer into the well of herself. Similar to research context, utilizing arts within clinical practice can enhance understanding and enable clients an alternative means of articulation. Part of the process within this project has been for me to look within myself, but I hope that through my process I may enable you as my witness to explore meaning within your own experience.

As is my own purpose, arts-informed research can methodologically enhance a pre-established qualitative inquiry framework, such as the current autoethnographic case study, though it can also function as an independent research methodology (Cole & Knowles, 2008). As I have indicated previously, it is important to note that arts-informed research may focus on the researcher but is not inherently autoethnographic, though I have combined these frameworks.

Data within arts-inspired research is not bound by conventional definitions (Cole & Knowles, 2008). In fact, artistic representation can utilize virtually any material, often in combination – “the options are as open as our imagination” (Eisner, 2008, p.7). The quality of information gathered through arts-inspired research is different and requires the researcher to present it creatively (Knowles & Promislow, 2008), often intuitively (Jipson & Paley, 2008). In an attempt to create evocative presentation while hoping to transcend the privileged arena of the institution, I am tapping into multiple artistic

mediums. As I have illustrated in my introduction, I have chosen to include various art forms within this study, and have allowed myself the freedom to explore without traditional boundaries. As such, it has felt appropriate for me to include narrative, literature, poetry, music, photographs, and art as visual representation, as well as the spoken word. To me, these formats are engaging and informative. They grasp an almost indescribable ‘something’ of experience that could not be obtained through the use of more formal academic documentary. The decisions about employing the arts within research can be complex, or may emerge as a result of inspiration (Knowles & Promislow, 2008). Alternative representations can enhance meanings where the written word may feel inadequate (Childs, 2004), and may help to personalize and contextualize meaning (Tidwell & Tincu, 2004). For me, the use of art, produced by others, or created and performed by me, reveals a primal or visceral facet of my experience. The use of mixed media within research may provide a complementary function helping to convey a multilayered sense of emotion with an immediacy lacking within conventional language or that is bound within traditional methods of research presentation (Childs, 2004; Knowles & Promislow, 2008). It has been my goal to create an artfully multilayered text through this use of multiple media within my research process and representations.

Often the generation of art within research has an emergent quality, conducted intuitively (Jipson & Paley, 2008). It can be experimental and this process may take precedent to matters of style, in the academic sense. In fact, within this project I have felt as though I am almost defying any attempt to fit within a model of stylized inquiry. I am aware that such a presentation may not fit within even more modern traditions of

research style. But as arts-informed inquiry can be thought to go beyond standardization (Eisner, 2008), perhaps my construction of knowledge will help to remove boundaries to inquiry, enabling not only witnesses by also myself to enter my experience and access my emotions in a more profound way. Like Jipson and Paley (2008), I have allowed a natural evolution to my project, incorporating aspects that have a sensory logic. I have followed my own instinct to “use whatever methods of inquiry and communication to further [my research] purposes” with the goal of experiencing them as “the transformative engine that carries the researcher to significant new discoveries” (McNiff, 2008, p.39). In this way “arts become as a catalyst and vehicle for the work.” (Knowles & Promislow, 2008, p.522-523). I want this quality of adventure to transmit to the witnesses, to allow you to feel that you are with me within the explorations.

Through the use of various sensory modalities I am attempting to reach different aspects of my experience as well as support perception and expression (Higgs, 2008). This could be considered process-oriented arts-inspired research that utilizes art within the process of discovery but is not the purpose itself (Kerry-Moran, 2008). However, in addition to art as data, the making of and exploring of various art forms within this project has been an important aspect of understanding within my experience (McNiff, 2008). I suppose some may consider what I am presenting as a sort of metissage (e.g., Chambers et al., 2008) or bricolage (e.g., Rogers, 2012), which I suppose it is – a collage of inquiry methods, a collection of created and found art. This form of research pushes against the boundaries of traditional qualitative research to explore plurality of form and meaning (Rogers, 2012) and Metissage has the potential to not only explore but support the creation of multiple selves, while also blurring genres and identities (Chambers et

al., 2008), an inherent aspect within my own research process. The goal is to create something new while maintaining the integrity of the original.

As I mentioned earlier, I was required to enroll in a number of mandatory classes as an undergraduate student in psychology. These classes involved statistics, quantitative researcher methods, and learning computer programs intended for use in analyzing complex statistical data. However, there is no special ‘arts’ coursework to prepare a researcher to engage in arts-inspired research, though a researcher can search for related guidance or courses, nor are there “standard measures of artistic abilities” (Knowles & Promislow, 2008, p.519). Courses with the aim to help students develop artistically refined skills and develop multi-linguistic artistic capabilities are rare, which I find unfortunate as “education of the life of feeling is best achieved through an education in and through the arts” (Eisner, 2008, p.7). However, skill may not be a necessary variable to creating emotive works. Leggo (2008), a poet and researcher himself, argues that we are all poets, though some are more or less confident in their ability to live poetically. Instead, it is the willingness of the researcher to breach their own boundaries to explore unfamiliar modes of expression and engage in new forms of inquiry (McNiff, 2008). “Life is emotional, and art provides a means for communicating and exploring emotions and emotive things” (Kerry-Moran, 2008, p.500). To me there is no distinction between research and life.

*The Artist*

*I am a collector  
I am a creator  
I hold the beauty  
Of all things  
In the pages  
Of my soul*



### Chapter 3 A Looking Glass World

*Down, down, down. Would the fall never come to an end? "I wonder how many miles I've fallen by this time?" she said aloud. "I must be getting somewhere near the centre of the earth."*

*~ Alice in Wonderland, p.14*

*God – Tori Amos (Track 5)*

*God sometimes you just don't come through  
God sometimes you just don't come through  
Do you need a woman to look after you  
God sometimes you just don't come through*

*You make pretty daisies pretty daisies love  
I gotta find what you're doing about things here  
A few witches burning gets a little toasty hey now  
I gotta find why you always go when the wind blows*

*God sometimes you just don't come through  
God sometimes you just don't come through babe  
Do you need a woman to look after you  
God sometimes you just don't come through*

*Tell me you're crazy maybe then I'll understand  
You got your nine iron in the back seat just in case  
Heard you've gone south well babe you love your new four wheel  
I gotta find why you always go when the wind blows*

*(Give not thy strength unto women nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings)*

*Will you even tell her if you decide to make the sky fall  
Will you even tell her if you decide to make the sky*

*God sometimes you just don't come through  
God sometimes you just don't come through  
Do you need a woman to look after you  
God sometimes you just don't come through  
Do you need a woman to look after you  
God sometimes you just don't come through*

*A Pool of Tears (Track 6)*

*I have come to hate the hospital. From the moment I arrive, I feel a sense of loathing for the place, possibly a projection of my feelings about this situation, possibly because after so many visits it seems to resemble a house of horrors, where your fears could become reality around any corner. I wish I didn't have to come. There is a particular smell that wholly belongs to the hospital. It is unlike the smell of anywhere else. It is indescribable, but if you've been there you'll know what I mean. Even now, if I close my eyes, I can bring that smell to mind and involuntarily my stomach will churn in remembrance. The hospital feels strangely both antiseptically clean, while also maintaining a perpetual sense of worn, dirty shabbiness. I can feel my skin crawling at the thought.*

*It never rests, the beast that is the hospital. It sucks in the broken and ill and spits them back out, hardly ever back to health, often none the better, maybe even worse than before, and sometimes not at all. The people who walk the hallways, who sit in the uncomfortable chairs, who rest their heads in weariness or grief against the walls are like the flowing of blood through veins, they are what keep the beast moving. There is never a pause in the consumption of the ill, even if you'd rather it all stopped to acknowledge the importance of one person. That would be akin to expecting an entire entity to acknowledge the importance of a single cell.*

*How can the sun be shining so bright and warm while it is so dark and cold inside?*

*I can't tell which visit this is, how many times I've been here, how many different rooms I've seen, nurses I've spoken to. They all have elements of the same, and really, what difference does it make? It doesn't change why I'm here.*

*mortality*

*the wasted stick figure  
whose roots are now  
tubes  
drinks life force  
from bags  
suspended on metal branches*

*Dad is delirious. They say it's from his medication. I refrain from commenting on the obvious irony that the medication that is supposed to be helping to make him feel better seems to be making him feel worse. I am generally ignored by medical staff anyway.*

*I can tell he's uncomfortable. While in his confused mental state, he's tried to move himself, to shift so that his side doesn't hurt. This is the side impacted by the car so many years ago, held together by pins and stitches. I know it still hurts. But in spite of his efforts to find comfort all he's managed to do is to twine the bed sheets around his legs and pull his hospital gown off one shoulder, exposing stick-thin arms, where after years of abuse and medication the veins are now too deflated for a needle to find. His shifting has also revealed the new medically necessary addition to his 'equipment'. He has been fitted with a shunt, directly into his chest. I can't help but think of it as though he has been assimilated by the Borg from Star Trek, beings who are part man part machine, their motto applicable: resistance is futile.*

*Another day but it is the exact same situation. Outside the snow blows in cold drifts as the evening descends far too early.*

*Dulled by medication, I don't know if he can hear me. As I sit by his bed, I speak as though he can. Perhaps my voice can help him through his medicated fog, to know that he's not alone. Perhaps my voice can help bring him back to the here and now. It is a hard position to maintain, trying to ground someone who is in a dream state, a landscape of which I am completely unfamiliar beyond imagination and sympathy. Normally, there is support, but I have come alone today. I no longer know why I'm here.*

*His hospital gown flows too loosely, too big for his now shrunken frame. I can hardly see his face for the oxygen mask and tubes. Who is this man before me?*

*The nurse assures me that he is being cared for, but the dried blood on the sheets, the crumpled blankets, and smeared feces show that this is not the case. Today I will not be put off. I surprise myself at my ability to maintain a firm position and not break down in the face of the unbearable. Today I am capable of pretending to the outside world that I am in charge and in short order I have two solidly built male nurses*

*shifting my dad to replace the padding beneath him and I turn away as another nurse comes in to clean the mess he's made. No one should be left to sit in their own shit.*

*There were doors all 'round the hall, but they were all locked; and when Alice had been all the way down one side and up the other, trying every door, she walked sadly down the middle, wondering how she was ever to get out again.*  
~ Alice in Wonderland, p.17

### *Who Do We Grieve For?*

Although I have made brief mention of some aspects of the bereavement literature that is available, I would like to take this opportunity to expand on this to refer to both qualitative and quantitative research that has been conducted in this area, in particular looking at the bereavement autoethnographies of others. I also detail part of my own experience of engaging with the research and how such research has impacted my understanding of the concept and experience of bereavement, grief, and loss.

I suppose one could argue that the fact that in this work I am examining splinters of myself is in concordance with the nature of a child's bereavement of a parent, where throughout life the relationship with the parent and those intertwining roles are inherently tied to identity (Miller, 1996). "[T]he self is formed in relation to others and sustained in a social context" (Brison, 1997, p.14). The loss of a relationship associated with lifelong affectional and attachment bonds can severely negatively impact well-being for bereaved adult children. There can be an additional sense of isolation that develops for an adult bereaved of a parent, as there is a view that it is normal for a parent to predecease their child, which can devalue the sense of loss for the adult child (Marshall, 1993; Parkes, 2006).

One quantitative research study has shown women who have lost a parent may experience a decline in happiness, self-esteem, psychological and personal wellness, and may also experience an increase in depression (Marks, Jun, & Song, 2007). There is the potential for very personal devastation when an individual's social context is disrupted, such as through the death of a loved one, as I have discovered. Such human ties when severed can initiate reflection on the foundational aspects of the self, relationships, and

life (and death) itself (Miller, 1996). This examination can also cause reflections on what we ourselves, the bereaved, will leave behind (Yalom, 2002). The perimeter of the loved one's influence is usually unknown, and therefore it is never clear what exactly has been lost (Parkes, 1972). I believe that the possibility of what could be gained is also unclear.

The death of parents forces us to rethink our lives, to reread ourselves. We read for what we need to find. Sometimes, we also find what we didn't know we needed. (Miller, 1996, p.xiii)

Exploring the stories provided by these splinters of myself has given me greater insight into my father, our relationship, and myself, and has also shown me that there is further to go.

From reading research on bereavement it seems that it may be 'common' (I use this term with some trepidation though I currently lack an alternative descriptor) for someone who has been bereaved to experience a struggle to readjust to living in a world that appears to have lost all meaning (e.g., Stroebe & Schut, 2001). There can be a struggle to define what it means to be alive and how it will be possible to become part of the world again (Parkes, 1972). This may involve a period of relearning the ways of the world, of abandoning old assumptions and creating new beliefs (Parkes, 2006). "Our real choice is not whether we will face impermanence – it's inescapable – but whether we will come to terms with it" (Bien, 2006, p.147). According to Parkes, it is the resistance to change, the unwillingness to let go and move forward with life which can form the foundation for grief (1972).

When my dad died, I grieved. But I also grieved while he was yet living. Each visit, each problem, each phone call from doctor, nurse, hospital triggered this response. But what does it mean to grieve? And what was I grieving?

An agreed upon operational definition of grieving has yet to be created (Howarth, 2011), and the terms grief, bereavement and mourning are often mistakenly used synonymously (Buglass, 2010). For my own clarity, and to some degree as a nod to my former research training that lives and breathes definitions and rigidity, I have created an amalgamation of definitions discovered through an exploration of the literature. And so it is my understanding that bereavement is the experience of losing a loved one and may trigger a grief reaction that can manifest as emotional, physiological, behavioural, and cognitive responses that are often expressed through various practices known as mourning. The process of mourning enables the bereaved to explore her grief and can also be called grief work (e.g., Buglass, 2010; Howarth, 2011; Stroebe, 2010). While this attempt to define what it is I want to explore within this project is important from an academic perspective I prefer Stephen Jenkinson's definition of grief as reflecting the love of those things in life that end (2013).

After he had gone, was I grieving that my father had died? I feel as though I should say that I was, that I risk being negatively judged should I say otherwise. But to leave my grief as simply being a result of his death would be too simple and in truth would be false. Dad had been ill. Extremely ill. And for a long time. Throughout his life, and even during his decline in health, he had put himself in many situations that would cause his life to be increasingly difficult, especially as he began to age. He knew this and did nothing to change it. I don't know if he was capable. So was I grieving that his

corporeal form had finally shut down? No. How could I possibly be 'sad' (for lack of a more eloquent descriptor) that his pain and suffering had finally ended? What triggered this grief response for me was a complicated mixture of my own phantasy and my own perceived loss.

I grieved while my father was living as I watched him lose himself and lose what could be. I grieved for a man who was 58 but who could have been half again that age. I grieved for him for the loss of body and the loss of any scraps of dignity that may have tried to persist within a care facility. I grieved for my own innocence as it disappeared like a bubble popping.

My dad had left many dreams unfulfilled when he died. He never travelled to Belize, though plans were always just on the horizon. He wanted to get a degree in Social Work. He thought he could be a singer. He said he would live forever. Dad's ideas often seemed to outweigh his ability to follow through. I don't know if he felt regret for the life he lived. I can only reflect on his life through my own values. And so, my phantasy does include the possibility of regret for a life unfulfilled. I grieve for my dad that he didn't experience his dreams.

I also grieve for what his death has taken from me. I grieve that I no longer have a father. I grieve for the lost potential in our relationship. I grieve for the lost possibility of my becoming a savior and helping him to defeat his demons. I grieve for many things I have yet to understand and acknowledge. My grief is in many ways a selfish grief. And in reality, I believe that mourning is for us, those left behind and the living.

In addition to the aforementioned impact of grief on an individual's psychological wellness, feelings of loss when a loved one has died are common

(Howarth, 2011). In addition, according to information I have gathered through an examination of an array of quantitative literature, bereaved individuals have also reported the experience of sorrow, numbness, guilt, anger, anxiety, sleep disturbances and additional physical symptoms, feelings of helplessness, inertia or, in contrast, hyperactivity, preoccupation with mortality and death, and a persistent fear of death (Buglass, 2010; Howarth, 2011; Malik, 2000; Stroebe, 2010). An individual who experiences disenfranchised grief may face additional risks, such as increased hopelessness, isolation, and guilt, and the lack of recognition of her experience may result in the questioning the legitimacy of her grief (Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2008). I believe loss also invokes a search for meaning, an attempt to find something to grasp onto within an incomprehensible experience.

For me, losing my father at the age of 28 was painful, confusing, angering, relieving, heartbreaking, and left me with questions regarding the meaning of life and death. This constellation of emotions, or a variant thereof, would likely have been present had he died when I was a child, a teenager, or should he have lived until I myself was middle-aged and a parent in my own right. In my opinion, there is some value in exploring filial bereavement in general as aspects of feelings of loss can be shared cross-generationally. However, differences in my own development, education, experiences, and changes I experienced in my transitions from childhood to adolescence and then into young adulthood have influenced my perceptions of life and, I would argue, have also altered my perceptions of death. As such, I feel that it is also highly important to explore differences in bereavement experiences across the lifespan and across individuals as having unique value to add to the bereavement literature.

The topic of grief, when viewed as a valid life experience to be examined and understood in its own right, can be a fruitful research topic (Parkes, 1972), and I have come across a wide array of research on the subject of bereavement, grief, and mourning. Unfortunately, it seems that there is a dearth of research examining the effects of loss of a parent in young adulthood (Marks et al., 2007; Marshall, 1993; Parkes, 2006; Petersen & Rafuls, 1998; Umberson & Chen, 1994). Research tends to focus on the loss of a partner, the loss of a child, or the experience of death for children, which, according to Marshall (1993) is “one of life’s better-studied tragedies” (p.71). Fortunately, researchers have begun to invest more interest in the experience of adult children losing elderly parents (Parkes, 2006), though overall there is a divide in most filial bereavement studies where the impact of the loss of a parent for children in ‘dependent relationships’ is explored or, alternatively, relationships where the bereaved adult has already begun to create a family and, I would argue, has begun to develop intimate support systems beyond those initiated in childhood (Petersen & Rafuls, 1998). My own conclusions from reading available research on parental loss is that grieving and bereavement of a parent may not be experienced the same across the lifespan. In addition, what I find interesting (and disheartening) is that within the literature, the effect on adult children of the loss of middle-aged parents who should be in the prime of life is a particular area of bereavement research where there is yet a gaping hole. Within the quantitative research literature it has been acknowledged that the psychological and physical implications for un-partnered adult children bereaved of a parent is unknown (Marks et al., 2007; Petersen & Rafuls, 1998).

As my researcher self reads journal articles and dusty books attempting to find some connection between what has been written and my own journey, searching for some handhold to help me climb what feels like a cliff hanging above the despair of being alone within my plight, I am frustrated. While it is interesting to learn that the number of people who have lost a parent skyrockets from 10% to 50% between the ages of 25 and 54 (Winsborough, Bumpass, and Aquilino, 1991), this only serves to perpetuate my sense of isolation as a bereaved young adult child, and tells me nothing of the experience of my fellows in grief. Finding conclusions from quantitative research that suggest that an adult child may potentially experience adverse or negative effects after losing a parent (e.g., Umberson & Chen, 1994), perhaps short-term, perhaps long-term (Marks et al., 2007), is far too simplistic and, again, captures nothing of the actual experience. Even much of the limited qualitative research seems to fail to connect with the intimate stories of the bereaved ‘participants’. For example, Petersen and Rafuls highlight the importance of exploring the subtlety and complexities within the parent-child relationships of bereaved adult children, but then segregate research participant details from their bereavement stories, preventing the reader from ‘getting to know’ the full account of loss and grief (1998). Instead, what is provided is a compilation of experience, an attempt to discover some generalizable aspect of loss.

While Petersen and Rafuls (1998) were able to present findings regarding meaning and experience of grief for adult children ranging in age from 22 to 55 years, the results appear to indicate the need for further, more individualized explorations. For example, the youngest participant reported a different experience and response to the death of her father when compared to the other five participants. This is perhaps because

of basic differences between the participants, such as four of the other five participants being between the ages of 45 and 55-years-old. In addition, this woman was the only young adult in the study, and was also the only participant who was not yet married with children. She was also the only participant who did not fit within the author's attempt to generalize conclusions regarding the experience of filial bereavement for adult children. It is possible that this woman's unique experience caused her to be considered as an 'outlier' (if I am to resort to positivistic vocabulary). It is also equally likely that her unique experience was based on aspects of her story or circumstance that were not explored, such as the unique challenges posed by development and context for younger adults when faced with bereavement (Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2010; Taub & Servaty-Seib, 2008). Perhaps that she was a young adult who lost a middle-aged father was relevant to the differences within her grief when compared to the older participants bereaved of elderly parents, or perhaps she herself could have defined different qualities of her loss experience associated with her grief and mourning process. Regardless, the individuality of her story would have been interesting to hear, but was ignored. I find myself drawn to a similar conclusion as other researchers in the field, that more research that captures the complexities of various interacting and multidimensional processes within the parent-child dyad is necessary (Marks et al., 2007). To me this means exploring the experience from a personal perspective.

I am not alone in my explorations of bereavement from a place of personal experience. I have been fortunate to find a number of authors who have examined bereavement autoethnographically, such as Carolyn Ellis (e.g., 1993, 2003, 2013), Jonathan Wyatt (e.g., 2005, 2008) and Karen Lee (e.g., 2007).

One particularly prolific autoethnographic writer is Carolyn Ellis who, among explorations of loss, discusses multiple bereavement experiences, including the death of her partner (1995), the sudden death of her brother (1993), and reflections on the death of her mother (2003). According to Ellis, there is an importance to autoethnographic writing about bereavement because “listening to, empathizing, and comparing experiences, feelings, and insights give new meanings to these events” (2013, p.35). Ellis describes writing autoethnographically about difficult experiences to be therapeutic and a means of contributing to making meaning in the face of loss. This form of writing may also enable the bereaved to come back to life. This is something I have experienced for myself through writing about my own loss. As I read and re-read her work, I found myself mentally chewing on one particular statement about bereavement: “Loss is part of living a full, loving life” (2013, p.43). Through her descriptions of bereavement, Ellis is able to demonstrate the importance of loss – in order to lose something we must first create something worth losing. In her writing on bereavement, Carolyn Ellis is able to create a participatory experience while also encouraging witnesses such as myself to find our own voices.

Jonathan Wyatt writes of his experience of the death of his father through story and poetry. Due to my own inclination towards the arts, I find this method of information translation appealing and engaging. In his short story, Wyatt utilizes the author’s voice to echo between the present and the past, a device that enables him to be able to portray not only his experience of loss but also his experience of life with his father, allowing the depth of this important relationship to emerge (2005). His ability to show complexity within a particular relationship is a goal I hold for my own work. In

addition, similar to what Wyatt expresses within his poetry and prose (2008), I find myself writing stories with the fear that the memories may slip away from me once my back has turned, as my father slipped away from me while I was away. I find that reading autoethnographic pieces such as those presented by Wyatt do not help me by providing answers. I don't believe that is their purpose. Instead such writing helps me by encouraging me to ask questions. However, the truth is that I don't yet have the answers. At the moment I only have partially formed hopes mixed within a process of analysis of a self that is ever changing in response to writing. The only answer I have is that the answers may change.

Similar to my own work, Karen Lee uses autoethnography to explore the experience of the loss of her father (2007). Within her article, Lee brings to life her final conversation with her father before he passed away, a conversation that occurred over 17 years before. Her evocative description of her remembrance feels poignantly familiar to me, "Can't let go of what once was. What will never be again. He is gone. Gone." (p.292). Although she describes a very different sort of relationship with her father and a very different culture of mourning, there is a similarity in our stories and in our losses. So too have I struggled with the idea that what once was can never return. Lee's writing also demonstrates the different nature of autoethnography and the opportunity for the writer to paint with words, the researcher to act as poet, to help the witness (in this case me) step inside of her skin to feel what she has felt:

Trembling, I linger on memories sheathed in honey, in nostalgia. It is true that I will never see him again, but I have the warm rise of memories. They will not fade into the miasma of time but instead, bring satisfaction to my day. Many

years ago, in the valley of a dry summer, his life ended. The sound of his breath uninterrupted by the rhythm of my life. (Lee, 2007, p.295)

Collectively, I feel a sense of 'rightness' as I gather these stories together. To me presenting an experience of loss in this way makes sense. I can understand the stories in an unfathomable way; each of these researchers, these authors, these people has brought me into their life, their relationships, their struggles, their losses. These stories share personal experiences of loss combined with the personal struggle to understand, and these stories offer witnesses, like me, an opportunity to immerse themselves in each unique experience of knowing and not knowing as the authors describe the pull of grief associated with being left behind by an important someone. I too have felt grief's pull and a need to explore my struggle to comprehend my loss.

*The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for some time in silence: at last the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth, and addressed her in a languid, sleepy voice.*

*“Who are you?” said the Caterpillar.*

*This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, “I – I hardly know, sir, just at present – at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.”*

*“What do you mean by that?” said the Caterpillar sternly. “Explain yourself!”*

*“I can’t explain myself, I’m afraid, sir,” said Alice, “because I’m not myself, you see.”*

*“I don’t see,” said the Caterpillar.*

*“I’m afraid I can’t put it more clearly,” Alice replied very politely, “for I can’t understand it myself to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.”*

*~ Alice in Wonderland, p.73 – 74*

*Who in the World Am I?(Track 7)*

*I used to struggle with the idea of having my dad at my imagined future wedding. In my mind's eye the image of his fluffy, ZZ Top beard, nose ring, and long graying hair did not fit with the sophisticated, classy, formal occasion I would spend months, if not years planning. And of course we couldn't serve alcohol because halfway through the night, to my imagined horror, there would be guffaws as my father entertained my guests, his captive audience if only due to the grotesque novelty of the scene. There I would find him as he made the tattoos of horses prance across his pectorals, an activity that I delighted in before I grew to care what society thought, his nipple piercing glittering in the posh candle light. How would my friends, my new husband, my in-laws comprehend this character of a man? How would a new bride-groom react to his new father-in-law when first offered a flask before being warned that if I were ever to be made unhappy my dad had a shotgun at the ready? How could I cope with his form of enthusiasm, amusement, support, and deeply held love when what I only wanted was to shun him from my imagined day of perfection? I will even admit that the thought crossed my mind that it would be so much easier if my father was dead. But how things change with the light of reality.*

*My father is gone forever. And I am now a fatherless daughter. He cannot walk me down the aisle, he will never get to step on my dress, insult my in-laws (saying everything I am too polite to say but what I really think), or entertain my guests. And me. He will never get the chance to prove how wrong my phantasy of him was, my proud papa, and I will never have the opportunity to apologize for projecting my fears and judgments onto him. More than this, he will never meet my future husband, or see me grow big bellied in the flush of pending motherhood, or greet his grandchildren. They will never be kept warm and safe, nestled beneath his fluffy ZZ Top beard, listening to the lullaby of his heart, rocked gently by the dancing horses.*

*My Little Girl – Tim McGraw (Track 8)*

*Gotta hold on easy as I let you go  
Gonna tell you how much I love you  
Though you think you already know  
I remember I thought you looked like an angel wrapped in pink so soft and warm  
You've had me wrapped around your finger since the day you were born*

*You're beautiful baby from the outside in  
Chase your dreams but always know the road that'll lead you home again  
Go on, take on this whole world  
But to me you know you'll always be, my little girl*

*When you were in trouble that crooked little smile could melt my heart of stone  
Now look at you, I've turned around and you've almost grown  
Sometimes you're asleep I whisper "I Love You" in the moonlight at your door  
As I walk away, I hear you say, "Daddy Love You More"*

*You're beautiful baby from the outside in  
Chase your dreams but always know the road that'll lead you home again  
Go on, take on this whole world  
But to me you know you'll always be, my little girl*

*Someday some boy will come and ask me for your hand  
But I won't say "yes" to him unless I know  
He's the half that makes you whole  
He has a poet's soul  
And the heart of a man's man  
I know he'll say that he's in love  
But between you and me  
He won't be good enough*

*You're beautiful baby from the outside in  
Chase your dreams but always know the road that'll lead you home again  
Go on, take on this whole world  
But to me you know you'll always be, my little girl*

*'One Side Will Make You Grow Taller' – Exploration of Identity*

At this point in time, I feel that I am able to begin to explore the impact of the loss of my father in a different way than I have in the past when the experience had a more immediate presence in my life. Previously, my focus was on the pain associated with attempting to understand the finality of death in the present. My father's death was like a stone dropped into the dark waters of a pond and my vision was narrow in an attempt to see what lay beneath the murky depths, to understand where it had gone. Now I am also able to bring my attention to the surface, to look at how the ripples could disturb the waters that reach beyond my current experience. The range of questions now include not only what it means for me to not have a father in my present life, but also the anticipation of what it could possibly mean for me in the future. The death of my father will be an experience that comes forth throughout the rest of my life, and will touch every significant event, and undoubtedly many non-significant events, in ways that I cannot fathom. It is only now that I am able to see that no matter that I have gone to bereavement counselling and am exploring the experience of loss in my academic writing the experience cannot ever be 'resolved'.

I feel that much of this exploration is concerned with the concept of identity, not only that of my father, but of who I have been, who I am now, and who I will become. I believe this also involves an exploration of my perception of the identity of the relationship I had with my father. People who are bereaved may experience not only an existential crisis, as I discuss elsewhere, but also an identity crisis can form for the bereaved individual as a result of losing someone, such as a parent, who has been a foundation of our past (Marshall, 1993; Parkes, 1972). While he was alive, one aspect of

my identity that was fixed was that of being 'My Father's Daughter'. Similarly, his identity was partially fixed as being 'My Father'. Our 'selves' were intertwined along with our lives. Now that he is no longer alive I am also left with what feels to be some rather deep rooted questions: What has happened to this portion of my selfhood? Have I been diminished as a result of this loss? Who I am now that he is gone?

Exploring my bereavement from the perspective of a daughter's loss highlights the importance of acknowledging the nature of the relationship between father and daughter within a broader social context. Though I believe that relationship dynamics are determined and developed by those specifically involved, the relationship between a father and his daughter is inherently different from his relationship with a son, as well as being different from a daughter's relationship to her mother, even if only as a result of gender. I have always been aware that the relationship I had with my dad was different than my perception of his relationship with my brother, and, as I have mentioned, my relationship with my dad was different from the relationship I have with my mom. Some of the differences within these relationships were subtle, such as use of tone and choice of vocabulary while speaking, while others were more overt, such as the choice of how we would spend our time together.

My response to my father's death has also, I believe, been influenced by gender. For example, it has been my perception that society will allow me to mourn more openly as a bereaved woman. A generalized view that women are more emotional has enabled me a sense of freedom to express what I feel, at least up to a point. I am also aware that exploring the impact of my dad's death through the concept of a future wedding comes from a gendered perspective. While I could discuss the gendered nature of the institution

of marriage as a result of the dominance of a patriarchal society, I could also argue that Canadian culture as I experience it supports independence and equality for women, diminishing the involvement of patriarchy in such decisions as marriage and family structure. However, I will refrain from engaging in this debate as it is beyond the scope of this paper and, really, is not the focus. I will acknowledge that utilizing the idea of my wedding to explore the impact of the loss of my father does raise some gendered questions about my loss and the potential impact of this loss within my future as a bereaved daughter now bereft of what could be the most fundamental attachment relationship I may ever have with someone of the opposite sex.

Who I was changed throughout my relationship with my dad. It changed when I discovered what it was to be embarrassed, it changed when I discovered the extent of his personal problems, it changed when he became ill, and it changed when he died. I am and have been many selves, both before and after my father's death. Some of these selves have been formed in relation to my role as daughter and some have little connection. Just like I am many selves, so too did my dad have many selves, both good and bad. Meaning making out his death has led me to face my perception of those selves, and my relationships with them. It has also encouraged me to reformulate my perception of remaining possibilities for change within the identity of our relationship. Meaning making often comes from our life experiences and in turn alters our identity (Howell, 2013). In turn, the identity that we wear could alter our experiences and change the manner in which we make meaning. The self who holds sway at any given time is likely associated with the social context at the time. In my current social context I am a bereaved daughter, a woman who has lost what could be the most significant male figure

from her life. In the face of this circumstance I am forced to reformulate myself within the boundaries of my gendered loss, to search for answers to tough questions of self and self in relationship. And I have yet to come to any conclusions.

I know that I am not alone in my search for answers to profound questions such as the future of the self after the loss of a loved one or how to incorporate a previous self into a future (e.g., Howell, 2013), and in no way do I wish to diminish the experience of loss within other relationship dynamics. I believe that each person who touches another emotionally does so uniquely and that relationship can never truly be replaced.

However, unlike a widower who may take comfort from remarrying, or a parent who can consider having more children, I can only ever have one father. Other than my mother, with whom I am fortunate to have a close, quality relationship, no one else will ever be involved in both the literal and figurative formation of who I am. I am like a tree that is now partially without root.

I think we often take for granted that patterns within relationships will remain. For example, I took for granted that dad would continue to be alive when I returned home from travelling to Ireland and that our relationship would continue within the frame dictated by our situation and roles. But this assumption, as with many other assumptions about the path of relationship progression, was wrong. I think we also make the assumption that we as individuals will remain the same, but in the face of bereavement we cannot. At least, I could not. My old ways have had to change, and I needed to learn and develop new ways of being, both within and outside of my loss. One impact that bereavement has had on my identity is that of forced transition. I have had to grow up and come of age in the face of death.

The relationship I had with my dad while he was alive, and the possibilities for change, growth, or development within that relationship have been cut short. In the context of ourselves as two living, breathing, interacting individuals, 'we' cannot proceed, and who 'we' were feels somehow stuck as a result of my dad's death. However, who I was within that dynamic has not disappeared. I have not yet 'shuffled off this mortal coil' (Hamlet, III, I, p.75). While the feeling of loss persists and there is a critical dimensional change to the relationship, I am utilizing the experience as soil to give me nourishment to grow, even if my root system has undergone a serious change. Looking back is helping me to go forward. My reflections on our relationship have helped me to see that while my father is gone, I can continue to reconfigure our relationship, I can work through our problems, and the relationship can continue to develop. Who I am has changed, but I can still continue to grow even when the soil of that change is grief. It is a practice in learning how to live with my loss, and learning how to live with what our relationship had been in order to create a new context for its future.

*She was looking about for some way of escape, and wondering whether she could get away without being seen, when she noticed a curious appearance in the air: it puzzled her very much at first, but, after watching it a minute or two, she made it out to be a grin, and she said to herself, "It's the Cheshire Cat: now I shall have somebody to talk to."*

*~ Alice in Wonderland, p.140*

*'Have I Gone Mad?' Bereavement and Therapy*

Loss is one area of my life where the boundary has blurred regarding my perception of self as a counsellor and as a client. I cannot explore my bereavement without acknowledging this and attempting to explore my experiences within both of these roles. To gain a greater understanding I have also turned to research on bereavement and therapy and the strengths and potential weaknesses inherent in theory versus practice.

Until recently, my fear of facing the inner emotional and spiritual struggle inherently associated with bereavement has felt overwhelming. At the beginning of my doctoral training, I even went so far as to request that clients searching for help to cope with bereavement be assigned to another counsellor. The loss of my father was still too raw. My thought process was that if I cannot face my own demons on the subject, how could I possibly help anyone to face theirs? I was terrified of what would happen not only for me but also for a bereaved client if my fears should come true that I was unable to provide a holding frame. This fear was based on a past experience. Not long after my father's death, prior to my doctoral training, I was working in a residential treatment facility and was assigned to work with a client who was also recently bereaved. My client's grief was more than I could bear. I have a vivid memory of us sitting in my office both our faces streaming with tears. The result of my own fragile state of emotions was that I could not even remotely provide an environment of containment and I had to refer this client on so that he could find help with his grief work. During this time, congruence dictated that I could not be his counsellor as my need to become a

client was far too prevalent. I needed to find meaning within my own grief. However, I didn't understand this until later.

I can acknowledge that at that time I was correct in my perception that I was not ready to work with loss in this way. But it was my subsequent refusal to work with bereavement, the ongoing terror that thoughts of such work could invoke in me, that helped me to see an area within myself that needed attention. Facing the personal loss of a loved one is essential for professionals to work with the bereavement stories of their clients as it is not unusual for another's bereavement to trigger the experience of loss for a therapist (Shear & Skritskaya, 2012). In my work as a counsellor I have found that stories of bereavement and other losses are not so different in the emotions that can be stirred up, and while I was running away from bereavement, I couldn't escape the concept of loss within my client work. Part of my growth as a therapist has been to accept my need to be a client and to address those fearful questions, haunting memories, and tightly held emotions associated with my own loss. I needed to do this to go forward as a person and as a therapist.

It has been said to me a number of times by different people that it seems the clients we need are presented to us when we need them, and it was at the end of my own grief counselling that I discovered the truth in this statement when I was assigned a new client, a young boy who had lost his father. Instead of running from the situation as I would have the year before, I was able to move through my block and face my fear, while in a position to explore the impact of this work on my own process of grieving with a supportive other. I found it surprising and positive that working with this client at that time was not a hindrance to my own process. In fact, this opportunity allowed me to

see that through working through my bereavement issues and fighting my own death related demons I had somehow become equipped to not only provide my client with a holding frame, but to hold his story with a newfound sense of congruence and empathy. I also discovered a previously unknown sense of peace within my own grief and I was able to separate my experience from my client's journey to come to terms with his loss.

Similar to Bryant-Jeffries views of bereavement therapy, as a counsellor working with loss and bereavement I try to emphasize the importance of allowing clients a space to find their unique coping mechanisms, patterns, and beliefs (2006). I also support the notion that the construction of beliefs surrounding death and dying originates from a complex array of influences that compose an individual's distinct worldview. In spite of the uniqueness of the experience of grief, numerous theorists have proposed various phases as an attempt to define the grief process (see Buglass, 2010), which, in practice, have often been found to be problematic (Parkes, 2006). As a therapist and as a client, I agree with the critics of the stage approach to grief work who argue that such a prescribed view of grief is too simplistic and fails to take individual differences into account. In general, stage models make the assumption that the phases of grief occur in a set pattern. However, the grief process is not linear and predictable (Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2008), and the stages are just as likely to be found to overlap or occur out of order (Buglass, 2010). In some cases, stages can even be re-experienced should the bereaved individual encounter grief triggers (Parkes, as cited by Buglass, 2010).

One such trigger for me has been experiencing the death of other people I have loved and cared about. Over the few years prior to writing this dissertation, I have experienced multiple bereavements of family and friends. While each of these losses has

been painful in and of themselves, what has been unexpected has been my sense of newfound grief of the loss of my father. Through these additional deaths, I have felt as though I am experiencing a mirror image of what it was like for me to lose my dad, almost like *déjà vu*; different but the same. If the passage of time is a poor indicator of the trajectory of a person's grief experience (Holland, Currier, & Neimeyer, 2006), within my multiple bereavement experiences a set of stages could not contain the many components of my grief.

However, keeping the potential limitations in mind, there are certain strengths to stage models of bereavement. For example, both Buglass (2010) and Parkes (1972) state that the exploration of grief stages can provide some guidance and general insight into what affective experiences the bereaved may expect. For myself, in my explorations of available literature on bereavement, I have searched for experiences like my own in an attempt to eradicate the feeling of segregation I have at being a fatherless daughter. I wanted someone to show me what it meant to lose a father, to help me grasp what I couldn't understand. And there have been some aspects of the familiar within the literature, moments of recognition of my experience that have in one manner or another helped to normalize some of the confusion in my continued struggle to understand who I am in the face of this loss. There is some reassurance in knowing that I am not alone in the world of grief. However, in spite of this, the uniqueness of my own experience remains.

I have encountered anecdotal stories from friends, acquaintances, and peers who have also lost a parent. Sometimes these stories have been shared after a presentation of my research, sometimes they have emerged through the discovery of our mutual

experience of the loss of a parent, and at other times the telling of these stories coincides with a request for support during the dark days following loss. Through hearing these stories, I have been able to connect with the person and their pain while simultaneously having the opportunity to reconnect with myself and the reality of my own loss, my personal transitions, and how I have developed within my personal mourning process. And though I have felt a sense of connection with my fellows in grief, my ability to distinguish important differences in our experiences has also been part of my process of mourning. So while there can be comfort for the bereaved to know that others have shared similar experiences counsellors should beware of utilizing a fixed course of grief work, such as stage theories, as this has the potential to leave the bereaved feeling a further sense of isolation if their experience deviates from what has been outlined (Marshall, 1993). Instead, some authors, such as Parkes, suggest that grief be viewed as a process of change unique to each individual (2006). Each bereavement has the potential to instigate a new process of making sense of the loss of a loved one, and a client can benefit from the opportunity to reflect on her unique experience within a supportive environment (Boyraz, Horne, & Sayger, 2010). Counselling can help the bereaved towards the road back to life (Pincus, 1974). It is important to me as a therapist to create such an environment.

As I have described, my experiences are not only as a bereaved adult child but also as a bereaved counsellor. Within this dissertation I am offering a deep exploration of the impact of loss for me as a daughter, but also as a therapist. The therapist must help the client to discover ways to bring herself to life in the face of death (Pincus, 1974), but must do so first for herself. And while it is our job as counsellors to be able to view

death from the eyes of our clients and to share with them what emerges from their personal experience (Bryant-Jeffries, 2006), it is also my goal to enable you as a witness of my experience to connect with grief through me, and hopefully recognize the universality of loss. Though bereavement may be the classic loss experience (Shear & Skritskaya, 2012), there is a fundamental humanity that underlies bereavement loss, and lessons from the study of grieving can also be felt by the non-bereaved (Parkes, 2006).

I feel that my own bereavement experiences have provided me with a deeper insight into working with clients experiencing grief from bereavement and loss. Indeed modern writers can contribute to therapy through their work:

Writers who themselves have gone through the hell of despair over the apparent meaninglessness of life can offer their suffering as a sacrifice on the altar of humankind. Their self-disclosure can help the reader who is plagued by the same condition, help him in overcoming it. (Frankl, 1978, p.90)

In other words, the essence of my grief exposed through the case study of my loss may help to heal the heartache of others.

I have encountered a hopeful quality to grief therapy that at first may seem incongruous with the topic at hand. I found Bryant-Jeffries description quite eloquent:

Working with people who are facing death or who have suffered bereavement, is to work with people who have been affected by not only the process of death, but the process of life. Death is the contrast that can make life seem more precious. Opposite, perhaps, and maybe that is the essence of the human story. (2006, p.169)

In the last decade of his life, Carl Rogers described a belief that while a body may die aspects of the self can live on through ideas and immortality through our impact on others (Bryant-Jeffries, 2006). In fact, it is possible that a “love of life casts out fear of death” (Pincus, 1974, p.250). Life is a continuum between conception and death, and so, while we can examine the meaning of death we also have the ability to alter the meaning of life.

*“If you knew Time as well as I do,” said the Hatter, “you wouldn’t talk about wasting it. It’s him.”*

*“I don’t know what you mean,” said Alice.*

*“Of course you don’t!” the Hatter said, tossing his head contemptuously. “I dare say you never even spoke to Time!”*

*“Perhaps not,” Alice cautiously replied, “but I know I have to beat time when I learn music.”*

*“Ah! That accounts for it,” said the Hatter. “He won’t stand beating. Now, if you only kept on good terms with him, he’d do almost anything you liked with the clock. For instance, suppose it were nine o’clock in the morning, just time to begin lessons: you’d only have to whisper a hint to Time, and round goes the clock in a twinkling! Half-past one, time for dinner!”*

*(“I only wish it was,” the March Hare said to itself in a whisper.)*

*“That would be grand, certainly,” said Alice thoughtfully, “but then – I shouldn’t be hungry for it, you know.”*

*“Not at first, perhaps,” said the Hatter, “but you could keep it to half-past one as long as you liked.”*

*~ Alice in Wonderland, p.114*

*Landslide – Dixie Chicks (Track 9)*

*I took my love and I took it down  
I climbed a mountain and I turned around  
And I saw my reflection in the snow covered hills  
Well the landslide brought me down*

*Oh, mirror in the sky what is love?  
Can the child within my heart rise above?  
Can I sail thru the changing ocean tides?  
Can I handle the seasons of my life?*

*Well, I've been afraid of changing  
'Cause I've built my life around you  
But time makes you bolder  
Children get older  
I'm getting older too*

*Well, I've been afraid of changing  
'Cause I, I built my life around you  
But time makes you bolder  
Children get older  
I'm getting older too*

*Well I'm getting older too*

*So, take this love, take it down  
Yeah, and if you climb a mountain and you turn around  
And if you see my reflection in the snow covered hills  
Well the landslide brought me down*

*And if you see my reflection in the snow covered hills  
Well maybe... Well maybe... Well maybe...  
The landslide will bring you down*

## *An Un-Birthday Celebration (Track 10)*

*I used to struggle to remember my dad's birthday. When I did remember it was more often than not a last minute recollection prompted by my mom. I find it interesting, and the irony is not lost on me, that now that my father is unable to celebrate his day of birth, I hold the day in mind quite far in advance. January 12<sup>th</sup> will always be a day where I focus on my dad, my memories of him, and allow myself to acknowledge just how much I miss him.*

*Another day that I am able to feel as it approaches is April 4<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of his death. An otherwise innocuous day in the calendar for me now holds a sense of dread. April 4<sup>th</sup> is a day where I focus on loss, and I often find myself with a heavy heart the closer the day comes. I am more emotional, disagreeable, and prone to isolation. I expect to be sad.*

*I have said before that an exploration of my father's death should also be an exploration of life. However, when I think of his birthday, a day to celebrate a person's life, I also think of his death. When I think of his death, I think of my loss. I am still grieving for my father and I have become aware that I spend less time enjoying my memories than I do in melancholic reflection of loss. I feel that this has also begun to bleed into other relationships in my life, with people who are still alive. Instead of focusing on life and living, I anticipate the loss of them from my life and/or their death.*

*I often focus on the experience of celebration days in the past. I feel that this is more than simply a matter of my being reflective. I feel stuck. This feeling of being stuck lends itself to a sense of anxiety about current celebrations. Instead of enjoying these days as times to rest, relax, or to have a good time, I now feel compelled to work towards making the day or event "perfect". Everything else in my life becomes suspended as I attempt to fulfill this goal, which to me is an overwhelming need. Because who knows if it will be the last one?*

*Celebrations are no longer to be experienced. Instead, they fill the need to create memories. I feel as though I am a squirrel gathering these memories to last through the harsh winter, to sustain me when all life is gone from my world. But perhaps such memory gathering can be detrimental. Perhaps I am only gathering the shell of the*

*experience since I am not actually experiencing these encounters in the moment. I often feel unable to appreciate the moment for what it is and I feel I cannot let an important moment go by without acknowledgement because I may not have the opportunity in the future. While on one hand this behaviour allows me to stave off guilt, likely associated with my lack of thoughtfulness for my father's birthday while he was alive, on the other hand, I am left unable to appreciate and enjoy these moments, and I experience a type of immobilization.*

*Interestingly, I can acknowledge that this is a sign of growth and development for me in my grieving process. Although I may only be retaining a shell of the experience, I am allowing celebrations back into my life.*

*When I was young, I loved Christmas, as most children do. But I didn't lose the excitement for the holiday as I grew up. My enthusiasm for the occasion never waned, and I have been told that others in my family found this excitement infectious. What I loved was the opportunity to see family, to spend time together doing things like put up the Christmas tree, make cookies, build snowmen (yes, I did this even at the age of 27), and play games together. Therefore, my very vocal opposition, even hate, of the holiday season over the past several years has seemed contradictory to my personality and previous behaviour.*

*The last Christmas my father was alive, he couldn't wait to celebrate. At this time, he was living in a private room in a care facility. Regardless of his limitations, he made sure he had a Christmas tree, and was attempting to organize a celebration with his children, in spite of being bound to his bed. I remember visiting him and allowing him to direct me as 'we' set up the tree, though I had to do all the work. This is a fond memory for me. My dad was looking forward to visitors and wanted to be as hospitable of a host as he could. But we didn't get to have a celebration together that year. My dad went into the hospital the week before Christmas. He had become very unwell, very rapidly, as he often did. It was a somber Christmas. Remembering the feelings associated with visiting him in the hospital, the smell of antiseptic mixed with sick instead of the smell of cinnamon cookies or turkey, I can now acknowledge that this was what turned me away from the holiday. It was easier to boycott this occasion than to*

*remember his disappointment, and my regret that our last Christmas together was in such an environment and so opposite what he had hoped for.*

*But I still love Christmas. I still love setting up the Christmas tree, and spending time with family. It took spending a year away from everyone I love, on my own alone and sick, in a completely different country, for me to acknowledge that even though my father could not be with me, it was ok to still love the holiday. And so, I am working on allowing things to happen naturally, though I do find myself forcing perfection on the day and creating expectations of myself to ensure that no effort is wasted. Much like all celebrations, I have noticed. My grieving process will endure my entire life. I say this because my dad will always be absent. But I'm starting to work towards a healthier incorporation of this loss to enable me to live life once more, to help re-mobilize myself.*

*I'll Be Home For Christmas – Kim Gannon & Buck Ram*

*I'll be home for Christmas  
You can plan on me  
Please have snow and mistletoe  
And presents on the tree*

*Christmas Eve will find me  
Where the love-light gleams  
I'll be home for Christmas  
If only in my dreams*



**Chapter 4**  
**Advice from a Caterpillar**

*“You’re thinking about something, my dear, and that makes you forget to talk. I can’t tell you just now what the moral of that is, but I shall remember it in a bit.”*  
*“Perhaps it hasn’t one,” Alice ventured to remark.*  
*“Tut, tut, child!” said the Duchess. “Everything’s got a moral, if only you can find it.”*

*~ Alice in Wonderland, p.148*

*Gravedigger – Dave Matthews  
(Track 11)*

*Cyrus Jones 1810 to 1913  
Made his great grandchildren believe  
You could live to a hundred and three  
A hundred and three is forever when  
you're just a little kid  
So Cyrus Jones lived forever*

*Gravedigger  
When you dig my grave  
Could you make it shallow  
So that I can feel the rain  
Gravedigger*

*Muriel Stonewall  
1903 to 1954  
She lost both of her babies in the second  
great war  
Now you should never have to watch  
As your only children are lowered in the  
ground  
I mean never have to bury your own  
babies*

*Gravedigger  
When you dig my grave  
Could you make it shallow  
So that I can feel the rain  
Gravedigger*

*Ring around the rosey  
Pocket full of posey  
Ashes to ashes  
We all fall down*

*Gravedigger  
When you dig my grave  
Could you make it shallow  
So that I can feel the rain  
Gravedigger*

*Little Mikey Carson '67 to '75  
He rode his  
Bike like the devil until the day he died  
When he grows up he wants to be Mr.  
Vertigo on the flying trapeze  
Ohhh, 1940 to 1992*

*Gravedigger  
When you dig my grave  
Could you make it shallow  
So that I can feel the rain*

*Gravedigger  
When you dig my grave  
Could you make it shallow  
So that I can feel the rain  
I can feel the rain  
I can feel the rain*

*Gravedigger  
When you dig my grave  
Could you make it shallow  
So that I can feel the rain*

*Gravedigger*

*Gravedigger*

### *What Does it all Mean?*

Until now, while I have alluded to the importance of meaning making in the face of bereavement, I have not addressed this process directly. However, I find it difficult to expressly state my process of meaning making beyond allowing you to experience this for yourself. I do not have a final answer as there is no specific conclusion for me to share. And I don't believe it is the conclusion that is important, but instead the journey. I have not been attempting to make meaning of my loss for the purpose of 'recovery', whatever that may be. I have no expectation that this journey is going to take the shattered pieces of experience and glue them into place to create order out of disorder. I make no attempt to provide "clean and reasonable scholarship about messy, unreasonable experiences [as this would be] an exercise in alienation" (Tamas, 2008, n.p.). As Tamas describes, the purpose of writing about a traumatic experience is not only to gain understanding but to feel and to acknowledge a level of unknowing within attempts to know. In other words, while I have been and continue to search for meaning within my experience of my father's death, I do so with the caveat that my search may result in my coming out the other side continuing to hold a sense of confusion. Sorting through the affective content of life has been an essential feature of my process, and, ultimately, meaning for me may end up being more of a feeling state than something that can be described in black and white on a page.

Grief is bewildering and frightening. There is a quality of madness that can creep in unbidden, and there is the risk of being haunted by overwhelming and inexplicable sadness. Grief is not rational nor is it logical, nor, would I argue, is the process of addressing grief simple. Grief work cannot be rushed. For myself, my grief work has

involved multilayered attempts at making meaning. In addition to acceptance of loss, Pincus describes the necessity of assimilation of the experience for the bereaved individual and what it means to them to have encountered death and survived, and this may take time (1974). According to Marshall, grief work may also incorporate examinations of multiple aspects of our lives, as well as the life of the deceased (1993), while Yalom highlights that the traumatic milestone of bereavement can also raise questions regarding life stages, mortality, and what is left behind when we're gone (2002). And, to be honest, sometimes my grief work has seemingly raised more questions for me than it has provided answers.

I believe that the concept of death is the ultimate irony of life. We live in the perpetual shadow of a pending death. But what does it mean to die? And what does it mean to still be alive when a loved other has passed away? My worldview, my view of others, and my self-view are continually being constructed as I attempt to explain and understand life in light of my experiences of the death of loved ones, and I often find myself with frustrating, unanswerable questions. This complete disruption of a guiding paradigm can be difficult to understand for those who have yet to experience it (Marshall, 1993), and yet, the search for meaning is a universal human phenomenon (Frankl, 1978). The existential crisis associated with the lack of meaning is spreading and the associated feelings of futility are increasingly the cause for clients to seek help from mental health practitioners (Frankl, 1978). Death is one origin for the development of an existential vacuum, as the mind scrambles to comprehend the awful reality of loss (Bien, 2006).

One day, for each of us, the sun will go down for the last time. Perhaps the whole root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we will sacrifice all the beauty of our lives, will imprison ourselves in totems, taboos, crosses, blood sacrifices, steeples, mosques, races, armies, flags, nations, in order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have. It seems to me that one ought to rejoice in the fact of death, ought to decide, indeed, to earn one's death by confronting with passion the conundrum of life. (Baldwin, 1963, p.105)

Perhaps as a result of the inescapable nature of death, humans have long been, if not always been, preoccupied with mortality and existence (Bronfen, 2000). The fact of death's imminence does not change, nor does the survivor's efforts to understand. However, as I have been examining my experience of bereavement within the framework of an autoethnographic methodology, I would expect that my representations of death are determined by social and political ideals and coloured by my personal philosophical discourse. When bereaved, those of us left behind may turn to practices, spiritual or otherwise, that are embedded in culturally constructed systems as a means of attempting to understand death. Such constructions and created representations of life's ending thus define our attempt to give meaning to what has come before. However, there is no objective measure, no empirical basis to rest our understanding of death. Because of the illusive nature of death we are prevented from attaining any true sense of absolute understanding and as the mind struggles to make sense of the reality and permanence of loss there is the potential for the door to existential crisis to be opened (Bien, 2006; Pincus, 1974). To prevent myself from losing my way in the dark wood of bereavement

and be overwhelmed by a potential existential crisis, I have attempted to fight my way towards the light, no matter how dim, offered by engaging in a search for meaning.

Making meaning in the face of death can be confusing. I have realized that with regards to my father's death this will be a lifelong process as I am faced with events and experiences that challenge my previously held perceptions of meaning. However, I believe it is likely that my process of meaning making has encountered an additional challenge, and yet also additional support, in the form of multiple bereavements. Within my few years as an adult I have been presented with opportunities to cope in the face of multiple bereavements including family, friends, and acquaintances, eight of which I would classify as significant relationships. Driven out from behind my fears, the senseless nature of my losses has stimulated my need to search for meaning, to be able to answer the perpetually elusive question "Why?"

Research questions generally arise from both a researcher's individual interest while still maintaining a connection to a general interest in a particular subject or type of problem (Dallos & Vetere, 2005). Beyond my wish to understand the abstract notion of grief, the origin of my interest has been derived from eight primary sources. Friends and family who have departed from my life in the past few years, all loved ones who with their individual flame of life each once lit a spot within my heart, but whose absences have since left me in an unfathomable darkness that I must navigate alone.

Stroebe describes the incidence of bereavement to increase with age (2010), while Parkes went so far as to describe a population with an average age of 40 years as unusually young to have multi-death experiences (2006). Bereavement distress has also been correlated with age (Marshall, 1993) with higher levels of suffering associated with

multiple bereavements for younger individuals (Parkes, 2006). I experienced these multiple bereavements before the age of 30. And so, while the focus of this dissertation is on my process of making meaning from the loss of my father, I must acknowledge the importance of these additional bereavements as to me they do not feel as though they are mutually exclusive experiences. Each time I find myself facing a new bereavement I find myself also faced with the memories of those who have gone before. Every time I contemplate a loss or experience another death, I am faced with a reflection of my grief over the loss of my dad. Although painful, it is possible that my engaging in such reflections on loss can contribute to a positive process of meaning making (Boyraz et al., 2010).

Sometimes the internal conversation looks to our past and what is no more. At other times, it looks to possible futures. It is as if two selves or beings are vying for dominance, one deeply emotional, loss-oriented and looking to the past in protest and despair, the other possibility-oriented, intellectual and beginning to explore the future with hope. The internal conversation between these competing selves can be rancorous. It is out of this oscillating back and forth internal conversation between past and future that meanings emerge and we begin to make sense out of our present reality. (Howell, 2013, p.11)

With continued contemplation I find that I am able to go deeper into the experience of loss, to explore my pain in a different way, and to reappraise my experiences and my way of being in the face of loss.

Meaning making is often a ragged and painful experience, one that may take years if not the rest of life (Marshall, 1993). Much like grief work, meaning cannot be

forced, though this search may be of central importance for those coping with grief (Holland et al., 2006). In order for me to begin to focus on meaning making within my grief, I needed to go through my own process which involved separating myself from my grief and gaining distance. It was only then that I was able to return to my grief. An individual's intrinsic motivation to search for meaning, whether with the help of a counsellor or through her own devices, provides a greater momentum towards recovery and health and has been described as an important aspect of the post-bereavement journey (Boyratz et al., 2010). The search itself, or in some cases simply the anticipation of a therapeutic process (Cooper, 2008) has been described by many authors to have transformative properties resulting in new levels of strength, maturity, wisdom, and awareness (e.g., Brison, 1997; Marshall, 1993; Parkes, 1972; Yalom, 2002). Meaning is constantly being changed and formed, not only with reflection, but associated with the representations of knowledge (Jipson & Paley, 2008). Post-loss meaning making can be enhanced through the use of narrative, such as what I am using in the presentation of my process. Moreover, the use of narrative within the meaning-making process can be effective regardless of length of time since the loss (Holland et al., 2006). From a clinical perspective, the implications for meaning reconstruction are not limited to recent bereavement, but can embrace the unique course of each individual's grief experience.

Part of the course of my grief experience has been to focus intensely on celebrations and anniversaries, both associated with bereavement and the future. According to Chow, what I have experienced can be called an anniversary reaction, which occurs when an individual experiences certain responses associated with the anniversary of loss (2010). Chow describes these responses as a bereaved individual's

attempt to gain a sense of mastery over the traumatic experience. Does that mean then that my efforts to create memories from celebrations and anniversaries are anticipatory anniversary reactions? Am I trying to gain mastery over an experience before it has happened? I know that I tend to place too much emphasis on the importance of special events as opposed to the quality of the experience, but the anxiety I experience is not unusual according to Chow who states that stress associated with event management is part of anticipatory anniversary reactions. Melnick and Roos discuss the importance of losses as markers in life, markers that can function to also increase awareness of attachments and can act as supportive resources in “reconstructing meaning in the aftermath of loss” (2007, p.101). Holding these arguments in mind, my focus on creating events and memories could possibly be a way for me to make meaning through continuing attachments with loved ones both living and dead, and to feel a sense of control over my own mourning process. This perception makes sense to me and helps me to see that my behaviour in this regard is one way that I am trying to incorporate my loss into my life in a meaningful and possibly even empowering way. Though, in spite of intention, I must admit that at times my ability to detect elements of empowerment within my attempts have been less successful, especially when the experience has not met my expectations.

My reflections on my losses and the recording of this search for meaning has changed who I am within my grief and has helped me to begin to make sense of my loss in a therapeutic way. My search for meaning has helped me to start to unpack my grief, to move through and move with the experience, and help me to be proactive in creating my own future within the shadow of death. Although I am a therapist, it was my

understanding of my own need to seek support in my exploration of my bereavements that helped me to begin to heal, and helped me begin not only to work with my own story, but subsequently enabled me to be able to provide a containing frame to support others in their own healing journey. According to Yalom, the growth, change and development I have begun to experience also has the potential to be like a pebble tossed into a pond, the effects rippling outward influencing growth and change in others (2002).

As I have said, before I could explore my stories and write about them in a way that felt appropriate, I needed some distance and space. I needed to take the opportunity to explore my feelings in their rawness, without sense or meaning. From this place of chaos, this tumble down the rabbit hole, I am beginning to make sense out of the inexplicable. By exploring the past, the present, and the future for myself within this experience I am able to understand, while yet accepting an inability to understand completely. For the only undeniable fact of death is that: “we do not know the truth of death” (Bryant-Jeffries, 2006, p.169). Anything beyond the time of death is mere conjecture. We experience death vicariously through those who have gone before us, but we the bereaved must return to the land of the living though we have glimpsed the incomprehensible landscape of death. While I have only just begun my journey of exploration, I feel that there is a clear demarcation between living and being alive. In my search to find meaning in death, I am also, then, engaged in a search for the meaning of life and what it means to live. My journey is to discover life within death.

*“Well!” thought Alice to herself. “After such a fall as this, I shall think nothing of tumbling down stairs! How brave they’ll think me at home! Why, I wouldn’t say anything about it, even if I fell off the top of the house!”*

*~ Alice in Wonderland, p.14*

*'Beware the Jabberwock' (Track 12)*

*I am adventurous. I take calculated risks. I am not afraid to die.*

*Whether I am getting onto a stage in front of thousands of people, speeding down a narrow, twisting, turning road on a motorbike, or exploring a foreign country where I do not speak a word of the language, I want to always try to face my fears. I have been called independent. I have been called reckless. I have been called brave. I have been called stupid. I think I am all of those things and none. I never intentionally put myself in harm's way. My choices may seem confusing to others, but they make complete sense to me. I do not want to live a life of regret. I do not want to wake up one day to find that I have become old and crippled without noticing the passing of time, with no stories of my own adventure to keep me company on long, cold, lonely days. I want to create a life full of colour, to paint the canvas of myself in rainbow hues that have yet to be discovered.*

*For my 29<sup>th</sup> birthday, my brother and my mom surprised me with the gift of a tandem skydive adventure. The surprise was accentuated when I discovered that they had also booked tandem jumps for themselves. Not only would I be jumping from an airplane at 10,000 feet strapped to the belly and at the mercy of a person I had never met before, but my family would be joining me. Perhaps, four months after my father's death, we all had a desire to look our mortality in the face, to dig deep within ourselves, to do this together.*

*On the ground, it seemed a lark. Strapped into our harnesses, we joked about chaffing in uncomfortable places, as we rehearsed our preparations for when we would fly out into the open air. I was to go last.*

*Squished together in the back of the tiny plane, the engines rumbled to life. My instructor, a cheeky Australian man, made jokes about the dangers of skydiving, which he then countered with reassurance. I think he was priming me for the fear, but also letting me know that it would work out fine. He had done this thousands of times and nothing bad had happened. Yet.*

*I wasn't prepared for the shuddering, the feeling of instability within the airplane as we took flight. As the wind whistled through the tiny, seatless cabin during our ascent, softened only by the roaring of the engines, it seemed as though the sides of the*

*airplane barely held together. At that point, I was more afraid of the plane falling apart before I was strapped into the parachute, than of the actual jump. When the time came one of the instructors opened the little side door. The wind nearly ripped it from its hinges and it banged into the side of the plane. Although at the back, I could feel the suction from that portal into nothingness, the coldness of the air at that high of an altitude. I couldn't help but shiver.*

*First one.*

*Then the other.*

*I had not anticipated the fear I would feel as I watched my remaining family members tumble from the airplane doorway. What would happen if their parachutes failed to open? The fear gripped me in the guts more intensely than any fear I had faced before. I wasn't afraid of what could happen to me during the jump, I was afraid of what would happen to me if I lost either one of them.*

*Sitting on the edge of the plane, I was more concerned with ensuring I saw open parachutes than in listening to the instructions I was given. It wasn't until the sound of the instructor shouting "1 – 2 – 3" into my ear that I remembered that I was supposed to be afraid, that I was about to be heading towards the earth at over 125 mph with nothing to stop my descent beyond a fragile strip of cloth. The wind pulled at me, wanting me to join in the freefall dance. And suddenly the rumbling beneath me, the noise of the airplane engines was gone. Strapped securely to the instructor, we somersaulted through the air, we turned sideways and backwards, the world shifted beneath me, above me, gone completely, then back again. Breathless, helpless, I was falling. Or was it the landscape that was moving, circling, rotating, while I watched in stillness?*

*And suddenly the tumble stopped, as we were pulled upwards by the opening chute that seemed so far above. At first, as I dangled in the sky supported by nothing more than a few straps and some bits of metal, I was overwhelmed. I clung to my harness. But although a fall from that height would be swiftly fatal, I realized that I was supported and as safe as I could possibly be. And then I tentatively let go. Gone were my fears, for my family, for myself. Only that moment existed, that feeling of freedom. With*

*outspread arms, I soared through the sky like an eagle on the wind, far removed from everything, reveling in the sound of silence.*

*I felt alive, maybe for the first time. And the world was spread out beneath me.*

*Devil May Care – Diana Krall (Track 13)*

*No cares for me  
I'm happy as I can be  
I've learned to love and to live  
Devil may care*

*No cares or woes  
Whatever comes later goes  
That's how I'll take and I'll give  
Devil may care*

*When the day is through I suffer no regrets  
I know that he who frets loses the night  
For only a fool, thinks he can hold back the dawn  
He who is wise never tries to revise what's past and gone*

*Live love today, let come tomorrow what may  
Don't even stop for a sigh, it doesn't help if you cry  
That's how I'll live and I'll die  
Devil may care*

*Painting the Roses Red*

One comment that I have repeatedly come across throughout the bereavement literature has been that experiencing bereavement can stimulate reflection on mortality. This statement has caused me to wonder at my own process and whether/how I have been pulled into such a reflection. Previously, I have not felt as though fear of my own mortality has been an issue. I am not afraid to die. Nor am I concerned about preparing for my inevitable fate by putting my 'estate' in order just in case, though that estate only consists of a 5-year-old laptop computer and mountains of books and photographs. This need to leave the remains of my life in an orderly manner may change once I have shifted focus and I start a family of my own beyond that of my childhood or beyond the family I have created with my dog, Min. Currently, she is my only 'possession' whose future, should it extend beyond my own, matters to me and I already know that she would be taken care of. Instead, I have discovered through my self-questioning that I want to embrace my impermanence. The importance of a life well lived has grown in my eyes, not the fear to live. However, this exploration prompted additional questions regarding my perceptions of post-bereavement mortality, such as what it means for me to face the mortality of others and how others may perceive my mortality.

*Hamlet:           Who would fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of? (III, I, 84-90)*

There is no single response to one's own mortality in the face of bereavement. For example, mothers bereaved of a child varied in their responses from ambivalence of the possibility of their own death to active suicidal ideation (Harper, O'Connor, Dickson, & O'Carroll, 2011). One response can be anxiety, not only as a result of the loss associated with bereavement, but anxiety surrounding the fear of our own death (Shear & Skritskaya, 2012). But I am not afraid to die. Of course, I do not want my life to end, but while I value the experience of living, my own death does not frighten me.

Is my not being afraid to die a lack of respect for my own mortality?

Bereavement can cause those left behind to ponder the reality of their own end, though facing our own death may be a highly threatening experience that humans are programmed to avoid (Shear & Skritskaya, 2012). In fact, the evasion of mortality is common (Milligan, 2007). If this is so, perhaps my lack of concern about my own death is a result of this cognitive management process. Perhaps I am simply avoiding focusing on the eventuality that I, too, will die. Perhaps I don't respect the fragility of life. But I don't think that this is so for me. There is a difference between not being ready to die and fearing it. I am aware that I will die. Moreover, I am aware that I will die and I want to live. This reduced death anxiety may actually provide me with a sense of meaning (Steffen & Coyle, 2011). I am brought back to Walt Whitman's *The Song of Me* (1881, n.p.):

*I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,  
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.*

While I do not feel a sense of anxiety about my own demise, nor do I feel a sense of impending doom, I know that I will not live forever and that I would like to make the most of my time on this earth, to not be afraid of the sound of my own ‘barbaric yawp’. To live authentically, we must acknowledge the reality of life (and death) and live accordingly (Milligan, 2007). And facing bereavement may help to decrease the experience of death anxiety (Shear & Skritskaya, 2012).

The greatest challenge to my acceptance of mortality after experiencing not only my father’s death, but additional bereavements throughout the past few years has been to face the mortality of others. The fear of death is a common experience for the bereaved, which Freud attributed to a culturally conditioned projection of the threat of abandonment by our system of support (Malik, 2000). I am inclined to agree. Personally, though I am not afraid of my own death, I am terrified of loss and losing those people I love, and I am especially fearful of the irrevocable nature of death which is beyond my current comprehension in spite of my attempts at making meaning. I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised by my newfound anxiety surrounding the mortality of my loved ones. “We often experience some degree of separation anxiety during periods when significant others are... perceived to be in some danger themselves.” (Shear & Skritskaya, 2012, p.170). However, I often experience concern for my loved ones during situations when it is unlikely that something negative will transpire. Seeing, for example, my mom and my brother drive away together, the macabre thought occurs to me that I would be alone in the world should something happen while they are together, that I would lose everything that matters to me. So far nothing bad has actually happened. At least, not to them. I believe experiencing multiple bereavements in recent years has undoubtedly impacted

my perception that the Grim Reaper is my constant companion. I am quick to ensure that those I love take precautions for their safety, urging them to care for themselves as 'special cargo'. But this is not my own phrase, this cautionary counsel is something I have heard repeatedly from my mother prior to my embarking on a new adventure. Her concern for me shows me that I am not alone in my worry for the safety of others and that others may worry about me.

I am a risk taker. But what of my mortality and the impact that the risks I take may have for others? It is difficult for me to acknowledge that through my attempts to grasp life I may be challenging the emotional well-being of people I love. It is hard for me to think that I may inadvertently cause someone to feel that same grip of fear that I have felt. And the fact is that a risk no matter how calculated is a risk nonetheless, and risk implies the potential for danger. I want to search for a middle ground between reckless behaviour and acting overly self-protective. Sometimes I manage, but I don't think this can always be possible. Through my experience of loss I have been witness to the fragile nature of the human body and spirit. However, I have also been granted the gift of foresight. My experiences of loss have helped me to see how important it is to make the most of my life while I can. Not to do so hedonistically or at the expense of others, but to work towards living what I can call a 'good life'. For me, this means loving my family and friends unashamedly and considering their emotions in the things I do; allowing myself to truly see how lovely life is and focusing on the good in my world; challenging myself and exploring new things; this also means facing my fears. The pain associated with interacting with my own story of loss can also help to provide me with a sense of attachment not only to my dad but to my mom and my brother as

well (Ellis, 1993). To live well also means trying to allow those whom I love to have their own journey while not being afraid to travel my own.

After we die, we are capable of having an ongoing, significant impact on the lives of others. Our presence can continue to be felt. Consequently, how we relate to others in life has the power to create a profound, lasting legacy that can survive long after our death. (Vickio, 1999, p.173)

The legacy I hope to leave is that life is worth living.

*Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night – Dylan Thomas*

*Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

*Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.*

*Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

*Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.*

*Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

*And you, my father, there on that sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

There can be a fear of what will come after experiencing bereavement. It can feel like everything is about to change, that the future is unpredictable. But my greatest

rewards have all come from great risk. For example, my experience of facing my own mortality through skydiving was exciting. Never have I felt so alive and free and that I held the power to accomplish anything I set my mind to. When I acknowledged that fear was a barrier to my future, fear of myself and for myself disappeared. However, no matter how hard I try, it is the fear of the mortality of others that still frightens me. This is a fear that can keep me up at night and stop my heart mid-beat. Regardless, there is an importance in discovering life in the face of bereavement, of discovering that adventure is not only possible but one of the joys of still being alive (Sanders, 1992). The choice to be curious, to take risks and challenge boundaries can help the bereaved reduce the immobilization caused by fear. For me this means reclaiming life from the hands of death.

*Live Like You Were Dying*  
– Tim McGraw (Track 14)

*He said: "I was in my early forties  
With a lot of life before me  
And a moment came that stopped me on  
a dime.  
I spent most of the next days  
Looking at the x-rays  
And talking 'bout the options and talking  
'bout sweet time."  
I asked him when it sank in  
That this might really be the real end?  
How's it hit you when you get that kind  
of news?  
Man whatcha do?*

*And he said: "I went sky diving, I went  
rocky mountain climbing  
I went two point seven seconds on a bull  
named Fu Man Chu.  
And I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter  
And I gave forgiveness I'd been  
denying."  
And he said: "Someday, I hope you get  
the chance  
To live like you were dying."*

*He said "I was finally the husband  
That most of the time I wasn't.  
And I became a friend a friend would  
like to have.  
And all of a sudden going fishing  
Wasn't such an imposition  
And I went three times that year I lost  
my Dad.*

*Well, I finally read the Good Book  
And I took a good long hard look  
At what I'd do if I could do it all again."*

*And then:*

*"I went sky diving, I went rocky  
mountain climbing  
I went two point seven seconds on a bull  
named Fu Man Chu.  
And I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter  
And I gave forgiveness I'd been  
denying."  
And he said: "Someday, I hope you get  
the chance  
To live like you were dying."*

*Like tomorrow was a gift  
And you got eternity  
To think about what you'd do with it.  
And what did you do with it?  
And what can I do with it?  
And what would I do with it?*

*"Sky diving, I went rocky mountain  
climbing  
I went two point seven seconds on a bull  
named Fu Man Chu.  
And then I loved deeper and I spoke  
sweeter  
And I watched Blue Eagle as it was  
flying."  
And he said: "Someday, I hope you get  
the chance  
To live like you were dying."*

*To live like you were dying.  
To live like you were dying.  
To live like you were dying.  
To live like you were dying.*

## Chapter 5 'Sentence First, Verdict After'

*"Why is a raven like a writing-desk?"*

*"Come, we shall have some fun now!" thought Alice. "I'm glad they've begun asking riddles – I believe I can guess that," she added aloud.*

*"Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?" said the March Hare.*

*"Exactly so," said Alice.*

*"Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.*

*"I do," Alice hastily replied; "at least – at least I mean what I say – that's the same thing, you know."*

*"Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. "You might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same as 'I eat what I see'!"*

*"You might just as well say," added the March Hare, "that 'I like what I get' is the same thing as 'I get what I like'!"*

*"You might just as well say," added the Dormouse, who seemed to be talking in his sleep, "that I breathe when I sleep' is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe'!"*

*"It is the same thing with you," said the Hatter, and here the conversation dropped, and the party sat silent for a minute, while Alice thought over all she could remember about ravens and writing-desks, which wasn't much.*

*~ Alice in Wonderland, p.110-111*

### *Wandering in the Wood of Research Ethics*

I have focused on the ethics associated with this project from its conceptualization. Maybe too much so, as I feel I may have over thought the possibility of encountering ethical issues. It has been as though my researcher self has kept a box entitled 'Ethical Dilemmas' beside her, allowing herself to constantly rummage within in anticipation of discovering some flaw in her work. I have explored the potential ethical considerations within this research for myself not only as the researcher, but also as the primary participant. I have explored the ethical considerations of working with a participant not only who can be identified, but who cannot provide consent. I have explored the ethical considerations for those whose lives and relationships are intertwined within this project, even if only indirectly. And I have explored the ethical considerations for you, the witness of this research.

I am aware that I have struggled against the draw to examine the ethics of this research project through a positivistic lens. However, the demand to complete rigid forms for research to pass the university ethics board has increased this struggle. I feel that many of the requirements for research that involves human participants also perpetuate the perceived importance of the medical model within the culture of university ethics. If I'm honest though, regardless of research tradition mandates, I am drawn to establishing a strong ethical guideline from the beginning of research. Whether as a result of previous training or my own system of values I am unsure. However, unlike within quantitative or even some qualitative research paradigms where there is a

clear demarcation of right and wrong in shades of black and white, guidelines for autoethnographic research ethics seem to include shades of gray.

In her autoethnographic novel, Carolyn Ellis provides a discussion on the ethics associated with studying others, including loved ones (2004). Put simplistically, this discussion acknowledges some of the potential ethical difficulties and dilemmas faced by (auto)ethnographers, concluding that ethics for conducting (auto)ethnography should support the notion of preventing harm whilst the researcher remains accountable for what is included in her study. Ellis also highlights the importance of researchers questioning the potential impact on participants of what has been revealed should a participant be presented with the research. There is some tension associated between this and another guideline that acknowledges the importance of presenting truthful research.

For this study, the person to whom I would most be accountable is dead. My father cannot give or retract consent, nor can he read what I have written and provide feedback. How then can I evaluate the participant ethics of this study? How can I ensure that what I am presenting demonstrates care and concern for my father's memory while also remaining truthful to my experience? I cannot hide this story behind a mask of confidentiality or even create an amalgamation of participants to disguise the person and relationship I am discussing. I have only one father, and, in reality, nothing can be done to protect his identity from being disclosed.

I have been reminded that part of autoethnographic writing involves a commitment to critical self-reflexivity and ethical representation (Medford, 2006). Though I am writing my father's story from my own perspective, and, as I have mentioned, there is an ethical obligation to present my experience truthfully, my aim is

to do so thoughtfully or mindfully. However, what I present of my father can also be thought to be only my perspective. Through this document I am remaking him in my image of him and what I may consciously or unconsciously need him to be within my process of understanding. Going back to the tension surrounding inclusion limits, Medford offers a cautionary guideline for dilemmas such as mine, suggesting researchers only include information that they would willingly show those personally involved in the story. This view is supported by Sinding, Gray, and Nisker (2008) who encourage researchers to maintain a sense of respect for those individuals represented within the research. This is in alignment with my responsibility as the researcher to minimize potential harm, such as what Ellis promotes (2004). This suggestion does not mean refraining from telling the truth within research, but instead refers to telling the truth in a considered manner.

Narrative ethics... position us differently in relation to ethics of care, justice, accountability and so forth, not by telling the literal truth (which in the case of ethical dilemmas and issues may not be possible to tell) but by creating the space for us to imaginatively feel our way into the experiences described, whilst remaining accountable to the spirits and values of the original storytellers. (Speedy, 2008, p.52)

Undoubtedly, my account of my experience of bereavement will not be completely revelatory, that would be impossible. Instead I acknowledge that there are aspects of the story that have been promoted while others have been excluded, and that there are implications for all of these considerations. It has been my goal to engage in a reflexive decision making process throughout this project. My father and I had an open

dialogue about many things when he was alive, and there is nothing within the pages of this text that I wouldn't have brought into discussion with him, though that is not to say that I would have done so without some trepidation. Sharing some of my perspectives of the way my father chose to live his life and how this affected me not only as I grew up but as an adult child would likely cause him pain. However, such a discussion may also have enabled a new dynamic within our relationship, helping both of us to grow. It is also possible that I am now better able to understand the life of my father as 'other', which holds ethical relevance (Sinding et al., 2008). While he cannot provide his input, it has been my goal to represent my father accurately and respectfully while also staying true to the complicated history of whom he had chosen to be, our relationship, and my experiences of my dad throughout his life and death.

While this research is deeply embedded in the life and death of my father, the specific focus is on me, my life, my perceptions, and the meanings I have attributed to my experiences. My exploration has been devoted to my own understanding of grief and loss, as well as life and living, how questions concerning these subjects arose for me, and how they may impact me as a therapist, a client, a daughter, a sister, a partner, and a friend (etc.). The various aspects of myself have been my research participants and ethically I must allow these parts of myself to exercise their own agency.

[D]eciding what to tell comes not from some rigid rule, but from living through the experiences we write about and honoring the feelings that come with the telling of the particular story. (Ellis, 2004, p.151-152)

There is also the potential impact on aspects of myself and my well-being that must be considered when conducting autoethnographic research. There is the potential

for this project to be read by not only university staff and students, but academics further afield, my family, or even the general public, which may have implications for my reputation in my personal and professional lives. “Vulnerability in a creative process is linked to our relationship with the topic at hand” (Sinding et al., 2008, p.460). There can be a disruptive potential within artistic representation. What are the potential ramifications for me as a researcher, an academic, a therapist, and as a person? It is important when engaging in qualitative research that explores sensitive topics with potentially vulnerable subjects, including myself as both researcher and participant, to engage in anticipatory ethics (Tolich, 2010). This involves attempting to anticipate ethical issues that may arise throughout and beyond the duration of the research project. For example, prior to beginning this research I needed to consider the possibility that as I am both the researcher and the study of the research and I am exploring a sensitive personal issue I could experience some negative consequences. In order to reduce the impact of potential emotional issues, throughout this project I have ensured that I have had access to regular personal counselling as well as actively engaging in other methods of self-care such as journaling, meditation, etc. With my personal therapist I have had space to be able to speak about sensitive topics related to the experience of writing this dissertation as they have occurred. It is important to note that the focus of this therapy was not on my bereavement experiences, though these sessions have enabled me to openly explore issues associated with grief and loss.

Although this dissertation primarily involves two individuals, my father and me, there are others to whom I must remain accountable within this research. I am not the sole surviving member of my family. There are others who have been impacted by this

bereavement, others who had relationships with this man during his life, and with whom I continue to engage in valuable relationships. It has been important to think of the potential impact of this research on these people as it may touch them, if only indirectly.

While it is my life story that I am presenting, I have attempted to proceed with caution as there will be others who may hold differing positions towards aspects of the story, others who have played a supporting cast to my experience. There has been the potential for emotional consequences for members of my family by my engaging in this research and I have chosen to not include the personal information of these others. Speedy (2008) describes the need for researchers to create accountability structures that involve the research participants and others by extension as a means of remaining within ethical boundaries when conducting narrative research. One option for mediating such an issue has been to maintain an open dialogue with my mother and my brother, the two remaining individuals in my immediate family and those most likely to be impacted however indirectly by this study. This is obtaining process consent (Tolich, 2010). By involving them in the process, I have allowed them to be part of my own journey, subsequently providing them an opportunity to have a “check-in” process, such as offering them the opportunity to read my writing as it is has been written. This process has also involved discussions about their thoughts and feelings of the content of the research produced throughout this study.

It is important to note that while I created and enabled opportunities for dialogue with members of my family that the purpose of discussion was simply to maintain relationships of trust and was not meant to capture the experience and perspective of anyone other than myself. The purpose of an ongoing process of consultation has been to

ensure I attend to important others in a manner befitting the nature of our relationships, to prioritize the thoughts and feelings of those people most important to me, who could also be considered vulnerable. However, I do not regard my family as research participants either explicitly or implicitly within this study.

In spite of my efforts to remain open with my family throughout my research, the question has been raised as to whether it is always appropriate to share the narrative of my experience with my family. There is no simple answer to this question. With the goal of transparency, I would have liked to provide my family with open access to all that was written. However, the care and concern that is needed when working not only with sensitive material but with vulnerable people counterbalances the former goal. To me this highlights the need for autoethnographic researchers to develop an awareness of the possible impact personal narrative may have on important others. It is impossible to anticipate all things that may trigger an emotional response when the topic necessitates the presentation of emotionally poignant material. Instead, what I have done is ensure that the shared material was beyond 'raw data' and appropriate attention to detail and content was given in advance. I have had to make judgments on the presentation of data as it emerges, which has become part of the process of analysis. There are times where in advance of allowing members of my family to act as witness I have also provided them with a cautionary plot outline to enable them the right to choose the level or degree of their exposure.

Another ethical consideration of which I have considered though I have only found mentioned briefly in the literature is my responsibility as a storyteller to those who witness my account (e.g., Sinding et al, 2008). The ethical claim that we as

researchers should be accountable and strive to do no harm to those directly involved in the study proper as well as to ourselves as researchers could also be applied to those who read my words. It would be to do you an injustice to not consider that what I am presenting may have an impact on you. While it is likely that those of you who could be most affected by the subject of filial bereavement have yourself lost a parent, or have recently been bereaved, this may not be the case. You may feel impacted by my story in a different way. However, it would be contrary to the purpose of evocative representation to provide excessive warnings. So too, I cannot necessarily predict the impact of an artistic representation. The experience could itself invoke a change in understanding for you within your own life. There is a difference between the experience of distress and harm, and the experience of distress may be inherent not only to the integrity of the research but may also be embedded in the effectiveness of artful representations to be evocative (Sinding et al., 2008). It is a fine line then to present such research to you, my witness, to enable you to make an informed decision regarding your involvement without undermining the purpose of the project.

From my perspective, providing an honest representation of my experience is necessary and ethical for the well-being of those who witness my experience. What I have presented of myself, the representations I offer of my innermost world, may be believed to be an accurate representation of the truth of my experience (de Freitas, 2008), and it has been my aim to be honest in my rendering of experience. But the question of whether I am presenting an objective truth is debatable.

What does it mean to tell the truth or to present information truthfully?

'The truth' is a slippery and multi-storied customer and few of us know what is deemed to be good and what is deemed to be the 'telos' or ethical substance of other people's lives, except those with insider knowledge.' (Speedy, 2008, p.50)

I have the power to determine my own situated-ness within my research and the genuineness within my presentation, and I have chosen the level of transparency within my work (de Freitas, 2008). While I invite you to enter my world I feel it would be unethical of me to invite you into a world that was deliberately falsely unrepresentative of my experience. However, the meaning of what I present will change for each person who acts as witness, as you will each interpret my story through the lens of your own history, culture, and personal experience. And so, while I have attempted to formulate genuine accounts of experience you may have already engaged in your own negotiations of my text and representations.

Re-reading these considerations for the ethics of autoethnographic research, it seems as though it is a monumental and somewhat uncertain task and any resolve that I may have succeeded experiences a tremor associated with my own self-doubt. Did I accomplish the task of maintaining integrity for the research as well as all those involved? It is for you as witness of this account to judge whether I have presented a story worth telling in a responsible, caring, truthful manner.

## Chapter 6 Uncommon Nonsense

*“When I’m a Duchess,” she said to herself (not in a very hopeful tone though), “I won’t have any pepper in my kitchen at all. Soup does very well without – maybe it’s always pepper that makes people hot-tempered,” she went on, very much pleased at having found out a new kind of rule, “and vinegar that makes them sour – and chamomile that makes them bitter – and – and barley-sugar and such things that make children sweet-tempered. I only wish people knew that.”*  
~ Alice in Wonderland, p.147

*A Wasp in the Wig, an Exploration of Rage (Track 15)*

*Some people won't want to think about what comes next. It can be hard to listen to. It was hard to experience, and it can still be hard to remember. Experiencing death changed me, both in a long-term sense, such as my thoughts and feelings about what it means to still be alive, to submerge myself in the philosophy of meaning and let my cerebral inclination take over. But my father's death also impacted my more primal, feeling self, particularly at the time of his wake. The unexpected emergence of previously unknown feelings enabled me to acknowledge a part of myself I never knew existed. Since then, this part of me has not yet reemerged, and I hope it continues to remain dormant.*

*Up until the day of the wake, I qualify my grief as sorrow. I felt uncontrollably weepy, confused, heartbroken, and lost. I didn't realize that something else was lurking within my shadow. Rage.*

*I am not an angry person. I explored arguing with my brother growing up. Occasionally we would yell at each other but there was never any violence. I still have never hit another person with intention to hurt. Violence, I have always been taught, solves nothing. I have always been a 'kill them with kindness' kind of girl, and frustrated several boyfriends by not engaging in yelling arguments when it seemed simpler to have a discussion. I have never really understood how anger could be like opening a valve to allow the release of pent up emotions, usually much more complicated to tease apart than simply being 'angry'. Believe me when I say my experience of intense anger on the day of my father's wake took me by surprise.*

*After 'the work' was done, because it always seems that the weight falls on those who are most affected by the loss, my mother, my brother, and I decided to go out for dinner, not to celebrate or reminisce, but simply because we were too exhausted to fend for ourselves. Having a vehicle with room for all of us, I offered to drive. Not to mention my mom had already locked her keys in her own vehicle once that day and needed to pay a tow truck to unlock the door. I was convinced that I was coping the best of the three of us. I had no idea that this belief and my own self-perception would be profoundly challenged.*

*Idiot drivers are everywhere, especially in busy parking lots. Having driven in the city I grew up in for over 15 years, I have come to accept this as a fact of life, no matter how irritating. However, something in me snapped that day when after circling the parking lot I finally found a free space only to have what appeared to be a yuppie in a flash minivan cut me off and steal my parking spot as though it were nothing. The pain and exhaustion of flying halfway across the world to lay my father to rest, combined with petty extended family dramas, the confusion of what I was experiencing, and the sheer chest crushing anguish I was trying to suppress was released in a torrent, as if a dam had burst.*

*My language was colourful to the point of sparks and darkness, as I parked behind the minivan, ready for a fight. I welcomed it. It didn't matter to me that the obtuse woman was with an eight-year-old child. To my grief-ravaged mind, this experience would teach the child that it could be dangerous to have a sense of entitlement to the detriment of manners and road safety. The woman's offense at my response and her attempted justification of her action only fuelled the flames of rage that consumed me, flames that could have set the world on fire.*

*I now know what it means to see red, though I wish didn't. I can still remember envisioning tangling my fingers in this woman's expensively coiffed blonde hair, gripping the golden strands into my fist, and then repeatedly smashing her face into the windshield of her overpriced vehicle. I, who was voted most congenial, awarded many a certificate for citizenship, and who worked in a field of helping people, wanted nothing more in that moment than to hurt, maybe even kill, this unnamed, unknown woman for the fault of her being a selfish, ignorant driver in the wrong place at the wrong time. Perhaps this anger was slightly misdirected? I ask myself with more than a little sarcasm. I can see that now, how I love hindsight and perspective. But at that time, in that moment, I needed the physical restraint provided by both my mom and my brother to keep from acting on that unanticipated response to grief.*

*I know that this could change your view of me, especially if you can't identify with the feelings I'm trying to express. I understand this. The experience changed my view of myself. I now believe I may be capable of things I never thought possible. I will*

*not say that I'm fine with my response because I'm not. Instead, I am owning it as a genuine aspect of my experience, no matter how uncomfortable it may still be to do so. I don't believe that anyone enjoys a challenge to their self-concept, especially one that shakes it at its very core. But I am now in touch with a dimension of myself previously unknown, and despite the verbal confrontation, I did not act on the anger. Instead, I learned from it in the time following the incident. I realized my coping was not as effective as I had thought. I learned that death can stir up murky waters, that grief is messy and painful and an unclear process that cannot be anticipated or delineated. I learned of my anger at myself, which was covering shame and guilt, and more importantly, I learned just how angry I was at my dad. I was angry at him for the way he lived his life and I was angry at him for dying.*

*Invictus – William Ernest Henley*

*Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.  
In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.  
Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.  
It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishment the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.*



*She very soon came to an open field, with a wood on the other side of it: it looked much darker than the last wood, and Alice felt a little timid about going into it. However, on second thoughts, she made up her mind to go on: "for I certainly won't go back," she thought to herself, and this was the only way to the Eighth Square.*

*~ Alice Through the Looking Glass, p.66*

*Conversations in the Dark*

The phone rings  
    You answer  
        2 am  
            you're still awake

*I'm scared*  
    I say  
*I heard something*

My world has  
narrowed  
in this moment  
to you  
    me  
        and the sound

My heart beating  
    You know  
        what to say

I admit my fear  
    to you  
        my protector

I try to not cry  
your strength  
supports me

*But what of the sound?*  
    I ask  
*I can't move!*  
You tell me I must

I'm scared

What if this is  
    The end?

*It won't be*  
    You say  
*I'm here*

The phone rings  
    I answer  
        2 am  
            I'm now awake

*I'm scared*  
    you say  
*Life isn't as I planned*

Your world has  
narrowed  
in this moment  
to you  
    me  
        and the booze

My heart beating  
    I don't know  
        what to say

I can't admit my fear  
    of who you have  
        become

I try to not cry but you cry  
your strength is gone  
I can't support you

*Life is too much*  
    you say  
*The pain is too great*  
*I can't continue*

I'm scared

What if this is  
    The end?

*It might be*  
    You say  
*I can't stay here*

Your voice is strong  
calming  
reassuring  
supportive  
safe

I gain strength from you  
to face my fear  
I fight back tears

It takes all my power  
to hang up the phone

You say  
I must fight the ghosts  
that lurk within  
my imagination

With the light comes reality  
the fear has been for nothing  
the sound  
only an echoing emptiness  
in the dark

Bringing me  
closer  
to you

Your voice is slurred  
from tears  
emotion  
fear  
alcohol

I lose strength from you  
I can't face this fear  
I can no longer fight back tears

It takes all my power  
to hang up the phone

I say  
I can't fight the ghosts  
that lurk within  
you

With the light comes reality  
the fear has been for nothing  
your threat  
only an echoing emptiness  
in the dark

Pushing me  
away  
from you

*Hurt – Johnny Cash (Track 16)*

*I hurt myself today  
To see if I still feel  
I focus on the pain  
The only thing that's real  
The needle tears a hole  
The old familiar sting  
Try to kill it all away  
But I remember everything*

*What have I become  
My sweetest friend  
Everyone I know  
Goes away  
In the end  
And you could have it all  
My empire of dirt  
I will let you down  
I will make you hurt*

*I wear this crown of thorns  
Upon my liar's chair  
Full of broken thoughts  
I cannot repair  
Beneath the stains of time  
The feelings disappear  
You are someone else  
I am still right here*

*What have I become  
My sweetest friend  
Everyone I know  
Goes away  
In the end  
And you could have it all  
My empire of dirt  
I will let you down  
I will make you hurt*

*If I could start again  
A million miles away  
I would keep myself  
I would find a way*

*“Only it is so very lonely here!” Alice said in a melancholy voice; and, at the thought of her loneliness, two large tears came rolling down her cheeks. “Oh, don’t go on like that!” cried the poor Queen, wringing her hands in despair. “Consider what a great girl you are. Consider what a long way you’ve come to-day. Consider what o’clock it is. Consider anything, only don’t cry!” Alice could not help laughing at this, even in the midst of her tears. “Can you keep from crying by considering things?” she asked. “That’s the way it’s done,” the Queen said with great decision: “nobody can do two things at once, you know.”*

*~ Alice Through the Looking Glass, p.104*

*Forgiveness, 'We're All Mad Here' (Track 17)*

*What do you do with anger and resentment? Where does it go in your soul? Or does it sit, like a leech, on the important parts of you, draining your life force, stealing the sustenance for anything good to grow?*

*When my dad died, I was angry. It was hard for me to acknowledge, he could hardly defend himself for his mistake of dying. But when I did allow myself the congruence of anger, I started to see that this emotion wasn't just aimed at his death. I was also angry at his life. I struggled to understand how he could have made the choices he made, to be the man he had been. And alongside this anger was my guilt for being angry. And the resentment of my guilt for being angry, and my resentment for my father for not being the man I wished he had been. Like an unkempt skein of wool, my emotions were knotted and tangled in what felt to be a hopeless, painful mess. At the time, I could hardly find the beginning of the thread, let alone begin to unravel the chaos or work to make it understandable. Forgiveness felt a long way off.*

*In 2009, several months after my father passed away, I had the pleasure of attending a special workshop at the addictions facility where I was employed. Having heard rumors about the impact of this workshop and having spoken briefly to the presenter, I chose to sit to one side as a quiet participant. This workshop was led by a woman whose energy can only be described as angelic. I've been witness to grown men, hardened criminals, hardcore addicts brought to tears through this workshop, softened and shaped. Though I was in attendance as a therapist, I could hardly expect to put up a stronger barrier than my clients, many of whom regularly shunned a connection to their emotional selves. This workshop changed my life.*

*My journey that day is difficult to put into words. I could describe the room, the environment, the people around me, and the activity, but I could not possibly capture the essence of what happened that day. Even if the exact circumstances were replicated, I believe the experience would be different. The shared energy within the room influenced this communal, yet individual experience. My own receptivity and openness, as well as my desire to understand, to forgive, influenced my ability to utilize the gift of that workshop.*

*I spent that morning exploring the unresolved feelings I had towards my father and his life. I was able to explore the difference between circumstance and choice, and to understand choice as influenced by circumstance. I was given the opportunity to hold my resentment and anger and dark emotions, to really see them for what they were, to name them, and to accept these feelings within myself. And I was encouraged to allow myself to grow with the negative feelings, to grow through them, to change the context of the barrier that was preventing me from healing.*

*Evolution is not a steady state. It is not a gradual experience of growth, but a sudden change, a step away from previous existence into a new arena. My understanding of my father and how he had become the man he had been experienced such a shift that day. And like a blockage within a river that has finally been pushed aside by the power of the pent-up flow, my emotions began to move. I was free. Not only had I found the start of the thread, I was able to see that the tangled mass of emotions wasn't as tangled as I had thought.*

*I felt like my body had first been stripped to the bone and was now covered in newly grown skin. I could feel everything with an incredible intensity. But no longer were my feelings aching and dangerous. Instead, they were beautiful in their pain because they meant growth.*

*My dad was still gone and I was still confused by the loss. But there was an element of understanding of the life before death, and that was good.*

*Here Comes the Sun – the Beatles (Track 18)*

*Here comes the sun (doo doo doo doo)  
Here comes the sun, and I say  
It's all right*

*Little darling, it's been a long cold lonely winter  
Little darling, it feels like years since it's been here*

*Here comes the sun  
Here comes the sun, and I say  
It's all right*

*Little darling, the smiles returning to the faces  
Little darling, it seems like years since it's been here*

*Here comes the sun  
Here comes the sun, and I say  
It's all right*

*Sun, sun, sun, here it comes  
Sun, sun, sun, here it comes  
Sun, sun, sun, here it comes  
Sun, sun, sun, here it comes  
Sun, sun, sun, here it comes*

*Little darling, I feel that ice is slowly melting  
Little darling, it seems like years since it's been clear*

*Here comes the sun  
Here comes the sun, and I say  
It's all right*

*Here comes the sun  
Here comes the sun  
It's all right  
It's all right*

*Once more she found herself in the long hall, and close to the little glass table. "Now, I'll manage better this time," she said to herself, and began by taking the little golden key, and unlocking the door that led into the garden. Then she set to work nibbling at the mushroom (she had kept a piece of it in her pocket) till she was about a foot high: then she walked down the little passage: and then – she found herself at last in the beautiful garden, among the bright flower-beds and the cool fountains.*

*~ Alice in Wonderland, p.121*

*The Myth of Closure (Nothing but a Pack of Cards)*

We are drawing to a close, but does that mean that the story has reached a natural conclusion? You may think that my coming to a place of forgiveness closes the book on this subject or that gaining a measure of understanding removes the pain of it all, but it hasn't. In fact, it has been my experience that the concept of closure within bereavement is a myth. There are no answers and I have no solutions to offer. Instead, the only succor I can give to those who continue to struggle with this question is to continue to share my own struggle.

I feel similar frustration to Boss and Carnes who describe a fundamental problem within accepted mourning processes within a Western society (2012). According to some unspoken decree it has felt as though there are certain societal boundaries to grief that I have been expected to align myself with throughout my process, as well as a time limit to how long it is acceptable to demonstrate to the world that I am grieving before I return to a state considered 'normal'. For example, after my dad died I was granted two unpaid days away from work, the first for the day of his wake, the second the following day 'to recover'. Two days was hardly enough time to 'get over' the loss of my father. And while I was offered little support in this regard, it is not uncommon for a bereaved individual to only be allotted between two to six months to mourn (Boss & Carnes, 2012). My own mourning process continues, though his death is more than four years past.

During her examination of women's artwork produced during WWI, Siebrecht describes the perceived importance of ritualistic aspects of the death ceremony for those left behind allowing them to achieve a sense of closure through providing a sense of

control (2011). The artistic depictions of grief that Siebrecht examines apparently show that rituals allow closure through providing consolation of grief. Maitland, Brazil, and James-Abra similarly describe the importance of ceremony and recognition of grief as important in helping individuals move through the process of mourning (2012). For me, however, this was not the case. My dad's wake did not act as a bookend to the segment of my life where he was alive. In fact, it did the opposite by opening my mind and heart and soul to aching questions of life and death. Seeing his life summed up in photographs and words in a single afternoon service, watching people pay respects before going on with their daily lives, did not relieve the tension that was created in me with his death, it created more. This ritual did not free me to 'move on'.

Siebrecht also describes the disorienting nature of open-ended grief for individuals denied the opportunity to engage in ritual through the absence of a body to bury, thereby only having an empty grave as a marker (2011). The implication is that these women artists would have achieved a sense of peace knowing that the body of their beloved was safely entombed in the earth. I can appreciate that an empty grave would create additional confusion for the bereaved, though I would argue against the notion that having a burial ground can be equated to achieving closure. My father's wish had been to be cremated, and we spread his ashes atop a mountain that overlooked the valley where he grew up. I found this highly personal experience to be rich in symbolism and supportive in my process. I suppose I am fortunate that I have a place where I can go to 'visit'. However, though the ritual did help me to feel more settled in my grief, I still have not found closure. After this ceremony I still could not understand my loss. I continued to want to have my father involved in my life. On my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday

my mom and I hiked to ‘Dad’s spot’ and watched the sun rise. This was two weeks before I moved halfway across the world to Edinburgh and a year and a half after his death. It was an opportunity to connect with him once more, and to celebrate with him this milestone year. I still made sure that he was part of my life, even though absent in body. And so, in spite of death rituals or a confirmed place of eternal rest I don’t think my mourning process can include the concept of closure as an ending. Instead of searching for the finish line, I feel I must try to simply hold the incompleteness of the story as I am confronted with the unknown (Boss & Carnes, 2012).

When someone we love disappears or dies, we reluctantly accept the legalities, but know in our hearts and minds that such clarifications do not bring complete psychological closure. The people whom we loved are always with us in some way—through remembering them at a certain time or place. (Boss & Carnes, 2012, p.458 – 459)

Melnick and Roos discuss a growth-oriented perspective of closure and grief (2007), which appears to incorporate aspects similar to my own process. For example, I have begun to integrate my loss into my life. I have discovered the potential for growth in spite of loss, and have begun a process wherein I search for and create meaning within the experience. Boss and Carnes also support the notion of creating a new narrative when facing the pain of loss (2012). Instead of one narrative in the face of my bereavement I have written many, and continue to explore the possibility of more as I discover new parts of myself and as understanding of various selves converge through my continued growth. I have continuously been faced with new selves within the experience. In fact, the more exploration I do the deeper my understanding and yet the

more I realize I could explore. The experience of loss has truly been a fall down the proverbial rabbit hole, and I have had the freedom to wander through the wonderland of grief and loss. The longer I (in all my 'selves') am in this strange new world, the more I am able to see things in a different light. This research process has enabled me to begin to understand my experiences and myself in a different way, to assemble these separate selves into a more cohesive whole. Moreover, I'm able to understand my dad and our relationship in a different way, and this has helped to ease my loss and allow me to begin to shift my grief within myself. I am able to move forward with my life, though on a slightly different path than I had been on prior to my bereavement. But that is the closest I believe I will ever come to the experience of closure.

My grief has brought to mind questions of an eternal nature, questions that I cannot answer, which means that within my experience the concept of closure feels misaligned with bereavement grief. Listening to my own stories has changed me. These narratives of life and love, death and change, evoke in me a powerful tapestry of emotions and contradictory conclusions, the biggest of which is that while my story with my father has come to an end because of his absence in many ways it has only just begun.

While in the grip of grief I have longed for closure and for the end of pain. However, I feel this pain because I miss my dad and because something I value has gone. The pain is different now that I have had time to reflect on my loss, probably partly related to reflecting on what I have left. However, this is a sort of pain that will be with me forever, and, if I'm honest, I don't want that pain to go away. I wonder if I

stopped missing my dad and I found the end of the pain of my loss, would that also signal the end of memory? I don't know.

I do not attempt to provide conclusions about bereavement or grief, nor even about my journey. I am still convinced that there is no real end point. Instead, I only hope to provide a glimpse into an experience, and maybe what I am sharing might just touch someone else, or kindle a sense of recognition.

*Keep Me in Your Heart – Warren Zevon (Track 19)*

*Shadows are falling and I'm running out of breath  
Keep me in your heart for awhile  
If I leave you it doesn't mean I love you any less  
Keep me in your heart for awhile*

*When you get up in the morning and you see that crazy sun  
Keep me in your heart for awhile  
There's a train leaving nightly called 'When all is said and done'  
Keep me in your heart for awhile*

*Sha-la-la-la-la-la-li-li-lo  
Keep me in your heart for awhile  
Sha-la-la-la-la-la-li-li-lo  
Keep me in your heart for awhile*

*Sometimes when you're doing simple things around the house  
Maybe you'll think of me and smile  
You know I'm tied to you like the buttons on your blouse  
Keep me in your heart for awhile*

*Hold me in your thoughts,  
Take me to your dreams,  
Touch me as I fall into view  
When the winter comes  
Keep the fires lit  
And I will be right next to you*

*Engine drivers headed north to Pleasant Stream  
Keep me in your heart for awhile  
These wheels keep turning but they're running out of steam  
Keep me in your heart for awhile*

*Sha-la-la-la-la-la-li-li-lo  
Keep me in your heart for awhile  
Sha-la-la-la-la-la-li-li-lo  
Keep me in your heart for awhile*

*Keep me in your heart for awhile*



## Chapter 7 Directed in the Right Direction Directly

*“You seem very clever at explaining words, Sir,” said Alice. “Would you kindly tell me the meaning of the poem called ‘Jabberwocky’?”*

*“Let’s hear it,” said Humpty Dumpty. “I can explain all the poems that ever were invented – and a good many that haven’t been invented just yet.”*

*This sounded very hopeful, so Alice repeated the first verse:*

*“’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.”*

*“That’s enough to begin with,” Humpty Dumpty interrupted: “there are plenty of hard words there. ‘Brillig’ means four o’clock in the afternoon – the time when you begin broiling things for dinner.”*

*“That’ll do very well,” said Alice: “and ‘slithy’?”*

*“Well, ‘slithy’ means ‘lithe and slimy’. ‘Lithe’ is the same as ‘active’. You see it’s like a portmanteau – there are two meanings packed up into one word.”*

*“I see it now,” Alice remarked thoughtfully: “and what are ‘toves’?”*

*“Well, ‘toves’ are something like badgers – they’re something like lizards – and they’re something like corkscrews.”*

*“They must be very curious-looking creatures.”*

*“They are that,” said Humpty Dumpty: “also they make their nests under sundials – also they live on cheese.”*

*~ Alice Through the Looking-Glass, p.130-131*

### *Data Analysis, a Great Puzzle*

I am relieved by and drawn to the level of freedom and creativity allowed for within this research process. However, the flexibility and freedom within arts-inspired autoethnographic research also means that there is no set structure or guidelines to follow, and even with flexibility of presentation, arts-inspired autoethnography, like all forms of qualitative research, must hold itself accountable to high standards through such criteria as providing a substantive, credible contribution to understanding (Sparkes, 2002). How then should research such as my own be evaluated?

There are inherent challenges when attempting to assess research that reaches beyond traditional academic conventions (Kerry-Moran, 2008). Issues such as perceptions of legitimacy, acceptance within an academic community, and methodological accountability have led to an almost necessary defensive strategy on the part of the researcher to feel the need to educate others on how this form of inquiry qualifies as 'Research'. As I have discussed elsewhere, one of my primary struggles has been to accept that my exploration of my own bereavement experience may offer a noteworthy contribution to research. I am pulled by the embeddedness of my previous learning to discuss issues of bias, and feel I must argue against an imaginary hostile enemy for the integrity of research that maintains a reflexive position. I also feel as though I must defend the use of the researcher within the research as a method of enhancement to the study as opposed to providing a hindrance or ethical dilemma. But these concepts belong to a different realm than the epistemology and methodology of an arts-inspired autoethnographic case study.

Ontologically speaking, qualitative research such as autoethnography does not attempt to provide proof regarding some aspect of an objective reality. This form of research is inherently context-dependent and subjective, and Alvesson and Skoldberg have argued that a researcher's personal politics, culture, social conventions (etc.) will always permeate research (2009). There are no objective measures of validity or reliability within this form of research beyond exploring the person as a whole. Returning to a matter discussed within the section 'Wandering in the Wood of Research Ethics', I must allow those who witness my account to judge the truth and usefulness of the story to their own lives (Ellis, 2004). As such, this form of research may function better to create questions than to provide conclusions (Eisner, 2008). For me to discuss issues of bias, let alone attempt to remove bias, would be to undermine an essential feature of autoethnography. "Arts-related research is still becoming. It is changing; it is unique, and as such it cannot be adequately evaluated through ill-fitting frameworks" (Kerry-Marone, 2008, p.500). The concepts of bias versus self-indulgence (Sparks, 2002) belong to separate traditions, though both can be associated with the possibility of a study slipping from research into a narcissistic immersion into the self. In spite of the predilection against which I am fighting, instead of utilizing positivistic delineations to assess the quality of such research, it is important to look within the literature of the research tradition itself to determine methods of assessment.

But how can we evaluate the elusive nature of arts-inspired autoethnographic research? Perhaps, like Jipson and Paley (2008) we must create our own categories that extend beyond the political criteria associated with external judgments of authenticity. Creating a context that permits judgment may violate the process of representation,

where the witnesses are meant to connect with the research in a different way. I find myself wondering if perhaps the rules should be as emergent as the work. This is an abstract suggestion, in line with an abstract language of inquiry.

Many of the representations utilized in expression of the lived experience of the researcher may feel resistant to the language of scientific analysis; they may speak beyond language through silence (Quinney, 1996). An image, poem, or other work of art may hold within itself a metaphor or symbol that falls beyond the researcher's ability of expression (Childs, 2004). Ultimately, the individual nature of such data enables and encourages flexibility in interpretation (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Ellis, 2004).

In line with the aims of arts-inspired autoethnographic research, analysis of the work can be both contradictory and provocative (Jipson & Paley, 2008). However, no matter how contrary it may seem, there are certain methods that can be used in the analysis of alternative research traditions. One benefit of assessment is that the use of some form of evaluation guideline could enable deeper access to meaning within the work. So too the process of analysis and deconstruction of art within research may change meaning and result in a need for further redefinition of what is known, revealing multiple layers of meaning (Tidwell & Tincu, 2004). It should be noted that while "the hallmark qualities [of traditional research] remain... the process, structure, form, and representations may be quite diverse" (Knowles & Promislow, 2008, p.522), and considerations in evaluation are not standardized. In fact, I would argue that it would be impossible to enforce standardized evaluation as this would be in opposition to the research process. While there are criteria for evaluating qualitative research that can be

applied to research such as what I am presenting, consideration of both content and form is necessary when evaluating quality (Kerry-Moran, 2008).

The first point of assessment would be through me, the researcher. I should be able to engage with my research and be capable of representing the subject matter (Knowles & Promislow, 2008, p.519). Such analysis, as described by Scott-Hoy and Ellis, can involve a back and forth examination of outside world and culture, and then turn inward to the personal world (2008). This examination would involve looking at life through a wide lens and then changing to a microscopic view of the self. For me, I have made this back and forth journey as I have transitioned from writing down raw emotion, to reading through research literature, to sharing my experiences with peers and other academics, and back to revisiting my experiences. I feel that through in-depth involvement with my selves, my stories have emerged to reflect my experiences as honestly as I'm able.

A further consideration for assessment of arts-inspired research is the seemingly incomparable multitude and diversity of mediums. The value of alternative forms of representation is in their ability to allow “maximum diffusion within difficult methodological work where everything needs to be considered” (Jipson & Paley, 2008, p.444), though “one can easily slip into an “anything goes” orientation that makes the research produced a kind of Rorschach test.” (Eisner, 2008, p.9). However, maintaining a focus on how a project can be of use – to the self, to others, to the discipline – throughout its conception and development can protect against such criticisms (McNiff, 2008).

But it is not simply my researcher self who makes an assessment of the work. In fact, after reflecting on determinants of good arts-inspired autoethnographic research, I am left to ponder whether only you as witness to this work can judge whether you feel that what I have presented qualifies as 'good research'. While there can be value in personal appreciation, evaluation is potentially more valuable when feedback includes dialogue between the reviewer and researcher, an option that is sadly lacking within this research process.

Kerry-Moran (2008) suggests that when assessing arts-inspired research, witnesses should examine research goals, the use of art, and the intended audience. In addition, according to Ellis, assessment criteria for autoethnography can include whether the story presented is engaging and resonates with the experience of those who act as witness (2004). Assessment may also include an exploration of the cohesion within and plausibility of the study. However, one oft mentioned tool of analysis that has been described as pivotal in determining quality within both autoethnographic and arts-inspired research is the ability to evoke emotional experience:

The ultimate criteria for judging the quality of arts-inspired theses and dissertations may be the responses of audiences to whom the work is directed. Perhaps this is the greatest challenge and hope for arts-related work whose authors are driven to make a difference. (Knowles & Promislow, 2008, p.523)

Each individual who acts as witness will come with their own history, their own unique constellation of perceptions that will shape the way they will interact with the research (Kerry-Moran, 2008). Different audiences will connect with different approaches and

different aspects of experience. For example, you will likely connect with different aspects of this research than someone else who may act as witness.

The intensity of the creative process can be profound or disturbing, but may also present unique strategies for responding to distress (Sinding et al., 2008). There is a powerful therapeutic potential within such projects that may also be appreciated by and benefit witnesses (Barone, 2008b). One can potentially change the world by first exploring change within the self.



**Chapter 8**  
**How Late It's Getting**

*And, though the shadow of a sigh  
May tremble through the story,  
For "happy summer days" gone by,  
And vanish'd summer glory –  
It shall not touch, with breath of bale,  
The pleasance of our fairy-tale.*  
~ Alice Through the Looking-Glass, p.5

*'O Frabjous Day' (Track 20)*

*November, 2011*

*I am feeling beyond words at the moment but I think it is probably important that I try to capture this feeling while I am ensconced in it.*

*I am sitting in the train station in Glasgow after having spent the day exploring followed by seeing Tori Amos in concert. I currently feel more connected to myself than I have in years. Her music has brought it all back to me, bodily memories (emotional/spiritual maybe?) of who I was when I was around 13-years-old, a time when I actually felt sure of who that person was. I hadn't realized how disconnected I've become. At that age, I knew what I valued, what was important to me, and my childlike wonder was evident in the truly hopeful manner of my dreams. There was no fear, really. I wasn't jaded or cynical. I was honestly happy.*

*Before I go much further, I think I should back up a moment and explain the purpose of today, and why I am feeling so moved as I sit on a bench in a train station at midnight. Today was a pilgrimage. Initially, when I heard that Tori Amos would be in Glasgow promoting her new album, I was excited about seeing her in concert. I love her music. Listening to her music then instigated memory, and the journey changed shape to become a way of connecting with my memories of my dad. I think back to times hanging out with dad during summer (long before he was really sick). I remember back to when I was 13. We'd sit together and watch Much Music. He thought Tori Amos was fabulous, and he introduced me to her music. This was something over which we could bond at a time when we were drifting apart.*

*But more than just that, I have been flooded with nearly forgotten memories. I remember exploring the old house near Little Dodge, going for walks in the orchard, "dad's fluffy, fluffy eggs", the Fuzzy Buggers who always got blamed for everything, getting my very own tub of Piña Colada ice cream, sitting in the back of dad's truck at twilight chatting and watching the stars, the warmth of the air, getting up early for picking, dad's watery hazelnut coffee and strawberry wafer cookies, mustard, cherries, listening to records, going camping with dad just the two of us, the porcupine and how dad wished he'd gotten me some quills, that god-awful orange blanket and lying in the*

*shade in the orchard, my special birthday shopping trips and sitting in Lion's Park with Fish and Chips from Mom's Fish and Chip shop on Sutherland. And this is only the beginning of what has come back to me, a slice out of the memory of the life of a young teenager and her father. These feel much better to remember than the times from when I was older where I would avoid his phone calls, find myself too busy to visit, and where I played a part in the disintegration of our relationship. And much better than remembering the years watching him fade away into nothing.*

*Today has felt uncanny. I came armed with some information garnered through a Glasgow Tourism website, though I hadn't put much thought into what it was that I'd see once here. I might as well have played 'Pin the tail on the map' to help me decide what direction I should go. The first place I found myself wandering was Glasgow's Necropolis. I feel somewhat embarrassed to admit that I had no idea what a necropolis was until I was standing in it. It was an eerie feeling to find myself in a cemetery whilst trying to make a connection with the dead. I then accidentally wandered into a Buddhist Zen garden outside of a multi-faith museum of religion that I had no idea was there. Dad used to joke that he was a Shamanic Zen Buddhist Atheist Agnostic with Christian tendencies. Or something like that. Appropriate. The spirituality theme surrounding my journey was completely unanticipated but very welcome.*

*One place that I had chosen to explore was the People's Palace museum. I had heard the Winter Garden was lovely. The building itself is quite beautiful and I took the opportunity to sit on the edge of the terracotta fountain outside. After admiring the building, I turned to look at the fountain, which is the largest of its kind in the world, and found that right behind me carved directly into the fountain was a dedication to Canada. It felt as though it was pointing me home.*

*However, inside the museum I had an experience that I found shocking and nearly supernatural. I still find it unbelievable. Wandering through the museum past WWII memorabilia, I suddenly found myself face-to-face with a 10-foot tall portrait of dad! My response was worthy of a B-grade movie. I stumbled back and actually hid from it behind a display case, almost as though I didn't want it to see me. How was this possible? How could a painting of my father be in a museum dedicated to the history of*

*Glaswegian life and culture? I attempted to casually walk past the painting, hoping my nervousness couldn't be detected by the older gentleman who was the only other person near the display. I rubbed my eyes and looked again and... there he was. There was my dad in his prime, complete with 70s style outfit and long black hair and beard. Well, no. It wasn't really my dad. In actuality, it was a painting of Billy Connolly but the resemblance was remarkable. I took a photograph and sent it to my mom and it even confused her. Ja sees the resemblance too.*

*Does it sound strange to say that I really have felt that he's been with me today? Because I have almost felt that I've been guided to these places, to see these things. I want to keep this connection with him, my past, and myself. By connecting with these memories, I feel like I'm connecting to pieces of myself that I have lost along the way to adulthood. I also feel a reconnection with dad.*

*But the most powerful experience of the day was still to come.*

*Tori Amos is amazing. The experience of seeing her in concert, of hearing her serenade transported me back to a different time in my life. I feel closer to grasping meaning, not of death but of life.*

*I know I've gotten "here" through different choices I've made. Now I'd like to use the power of choice to try to touch my past, remember what it was like to be me of 'back then' while still moving forward. I know I can't be the same person I was but I would like to reinvent aspects of that person, that life, that way of being, into my present and future. I like who I was then.*

*I have to admit that I'm a bit afraid that I'll lose this feeling come morning. I need to use the music of Tori Amos as an auditory connection. I think I also need to go over what was important to me then, and explore the creed I used to follow and see how different it is to my current value system. I think a big thing was allowing myself to have childlike wonder at the little things, to focus on the excitement of life instead of the negatives, to try to see the beauty in the world – 'back then' I was actually able to see it without having to try, it came naturally. This loss may happen to everyone as they get older and have new responsibilities but I want to get it back. It is part of me that I really treasure. This means loving my friends unashamedly, seeing how lovely life is and*

*focusing on what is good in my world. Life can be so wonderful, how or why have I let that understanding slip away from me? Though I suppose with all the tragedy these past few years, it would be hard to not let some of the joy of life escape.*

*I miss my dad. But, at the moment, based on the synchronicity I experienced throughout the day, I am more inclined than ever to believe in something more. I almost had a heart attack when I came upon the painting. It felt like he was saying “I’m with you Sweetums”, or “Don’t worry, Punkin, I’m with you still”. It was surreal.*

*One last thing before I sign off and head for the train: “Hi dad” ☺*



An artist's rendition of Billy Connolly



Randall Sehn

*Happy Phantom – Tori Amos (Track 21)*

*And if I die today I'll be the happy phantom  
And I'll go chasing the nuns out in the yard  
And I'll run naked through the streets without my mask on  
And I will never need umbrellas in the rain  
I'll wake up in strawberry fields every day  
And the atrocities of school I can forgive  
The happy phantom has no right to bitch*

*Ooo the time is getting closer  
Ooo time to be a ghost  
Ooo every day we're getting closer  
The sun is getting dim  
Will we pay for who we've been*

*So if I die today I'll be the happy phantom  
And I'll go wearing my naughties like a jewel  
They'll be my ticket to the universal opera  
There's Judy Garland taking Buddha by the hand  
And then these seven little men get up to dance  
They say Confucius does his crossword with a pen  
I'm still the angel to a girl who hates to sin*

*Ooo the time is getting closer  
Ooo time to be a ghost  
Ooo every day we're getting closer  
The sun is getting dim  
Will I pay for who I've been*

*Or will I see you dear and wish I could come back  
You found a girl that you could truly love again  
Will you still call for me when she falls asleep  
Or do we soon forget the things we cannot see*

*Ooo the time is getting closer  
Ooo time to be a ghost  
Ooo every day we're getting closer  
The sun is getting dim  
Will I pay for who I've been*

*And if I die today  
And if I die today  
And if I die today  
I'll chase the nuns out in the yard*

*“What does it matter where my body happens to be?” he said. “My mind goes on working all the same. In fact, the more head-downwards I am, the more I keep inventing new things.”*

*~ Alice Through the Looking-Glass, p.176*

*'I'm Through with White Rabbits'*

This final section examines the association between spirituality and the loss of my dad. I have avoided exploring spirituality and religion up to this point because I find that in many ways the topic is beyond my grasp. Question: Where do we go when we die? Answer: I don't know. And I will never know. That is, until *I* die. Is there a heaven and a hell? Is there such a thing as ghosts? Are our spirits reincarnated? Does our spirit remain while our bodies decompose or become dust on the wind? Insert the remaining multitude of questions on spirituality that flutter around my brain and heart like a swarm of butterflies, difficult to catch. I have no answers to any of these questions and any supposition I may have is not firmly grounded. I have found writing this to be a struggle, which is far from ironic as the topic is something I struggle to grasp.

My struggle surrounds what I refer to as The Great Afterlife Debate.

In order to contribute to a debate on the afterlife I feel I need a greater understanding of both philosophy and theology, a grasp of topics so vast a lifetime could not contain even one. I am not a philosopher, and I am not a theologian. I am simply a person bereaved and I offer a single perception that is more question than answer.

The summer I turned 13 I bought a Ouija board. Fascinated with the mystical, I was intrigued by accounts of extrasensory perception, unexplained mysteries, magic, and ghosts. My brother and I played with the board a few times, but other than when he (very obviously) was teasing me by moving the pointer himself, nothing happened. How disappointing. Perhaps it was simply because at that stage of my life I had not experienced the death of a loved person so who would be 'there' (where?) to respond to the questions of a child? And my hamsters and other pets that had passed probably never

learned how to spell. Or perhaps it was just a toy that offered no connection to the inexplicable. I lost interest in it quite quickly. In my childish attempt to gain access to understanding that is beyond the grasp of the living, I had received no easy answers.

Nearly 20 years later and I'm no closer to answers, though I feel as though I have had both a broader and deeper experience of the questions. I now know what it means to lose an important someone. Many 'someone's actually. Instead of merely a curiosity of what might lie outside human comprehension I've personally experienced driving questions that surround the afterlife and beyond.

*What does it mean to die?*

It is reassuring to discover that there is vast confusion about this topic, if mass confusion can truly hold a measure of reassurance. There are no definitive answers as to what happens when we die. Death is only quantifiable based on statistics associated with occurrence; we are unable to capture the essence of what it is to die (Bronfen, 2000). How can I hold any particular belief of what happens after death when so many options and religions exist, all of whom claim that their understanding is Truth? Through various avenues I have been exposed to Christianity in different forms (e.g., Protestantism and Catholicism), Judaism, Paganism, Druidism, Buddhism, Atheism, Agnosticism, Pantheism, as well as a host of eclectic collections of individually created religions and spiritual faiths. In spite of my lack of a particular faith, I do not consider myself atheist or even agnostic. I am far too unsure to stake a claim with any religious/anti-religious faction, and I am yet unconvinced that spirituality is inherently unknowable. While I shy away from any particular faith, I find myself seemingly inexplicably drawn to certain qualities of the spiritual realm and potential ways of holding the unknown. While I am

resistant to boundaries set by organized religion, I have felt the pull of energy and synchronicity that I cannot explain. I have tried to find some defined spirituality that fit me perfectly, that I could wear not only with pride but also with genuine respect for the ideologies inherent within. I am still searching.

When I think of this subject, I feel lost and tired. I feel as though I have no place and that my spiritual self is floating like a balloon, tethered with only a fragile string that could be snapped by a sharp breeze. This is one of my as of yet unresolved struggles.

Tedeschi and Calhoun describe varied responses to bereavement (2006). Some people struggle with the confusion of bereavement and may feel a loss of faith while others may experience a reintegration of religious beliefs within a personal value system, while still others hold a different view of the role of religions and spirituality within their bereavement experiences. Within my own quest for understanding, I do not question the role of a 'God' in the death of my father, because I question the nature of such divinity to begin with, both within this particular case, as well as within the structure of my ontology of life and death. I feel no religious affront by his death and in this sense my values have not been disturbed. I did not experience a reconsideration of previously held beliefs, since I feel I hold mainly questions surrounding the subject. Unlike some bereaved individuals, my previous understanding of the spiritual realm has not been drastically challenged, and I have not come to any conclusions. In my search for meaning, I choose not to explore the possibility of motive or transcendental love from a divine being. I have not been angry at God, or at the world, no matter that my anger responses may have been directed outward, nor have I held a sense of injustice of my father's death. However, I have been angry at my father for his choices in life that I

know led to his death, and I have been angry at myself for not being more proactive within our relationship. But there has never been an emotion directed towards a nameless, faceless otherworldly being.

While many individuals struggle with the distress of bereavement as a spiritual or religious dilemma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2006), I have not. I do not feel that my father was 'taken from me' nor was his death a matter of destiny. It could be suggested that my lack of anger or feeling challenged spiritually is a result of a perception of the natural order of things, that the death of an adult is not out of the norm, or instead perhaps it is my unconscious view of the mercy of 'God' for ending his pain and suffering. While I do feel that the end of his pain was a mercy, I do not attribute this to an act of God. My perspective has not embodied visions of order within an unordered world, nor do I hold in mind the possibility of a conscious, loving divinity, and I have found no comfort through religious faith. I have sometimes wondered if perhaps it is to my own detriment that I do not find satisfaction within a religious or spiritual realm.

Much like after a trauma, I cannot remember many things surrounding the death of my father. I catch glimpses in my memory, shadows that slip by the corner of my eye, mostly insubstantial. But I can remember a conversation I had with a friend of mine who supports the notion of the unified field and states his spirituality is based in metaphysics. My understanding of this is that, for him, holding metaphysics in the category of the spiritual is to embrace the overarching ontological question of being (or what it means 'to be') while questioning existence and possibility. At least this is what I took from our conversation. And unlike the blurred memories and confused recollections of that time,

the concepts discussed in this conversation, and where my thoughts were led, have stayed with me.

I believe that we as humans are composed of energy. Some may call this the spirit, though I prefer not to. From a scientific perspective, energy cannot be destroyed. If that is true and a human contains energy I am left to think that with the decomposition of the body that energy will change form, but it will not diminish. I don't believe in heaven, to me that doesn't feel feasible, but this idea connects within me. To me the concept of energy could also be associated with the sense of presence I experienced during my pilgrimage to see Tori Amos. In this way, I do not require a belief in an afterlife to maintain a connection with my dad, nor do I feel that a continuing bond is dependent on ascribing to a particular religious doctrine. However, there is more to the experience than I can explain. I 'felt' my dad. Or did I just want to? The experience of sensing my father's energy during a time when I wanted to feel a connection fits with my spiritual paradigm of the unknown and unknowable.

According to Melnick and Roos, quantum mechanics has revealed that within theories of the nature of the universe "things become definite only when an observation forces them to relinquish quantum possibilities and settle on specific outcomes" (2007, p.93). This means that while we can make a guess about the probability of some aspect of the universe we cannot really know it until it has come to be. Whether we refer to the experience of grief, an individual's unique process of mourning, or the actual experience of death, quantum physics supports the notion that we cannot know in advance. This continues a discussion from an earlier section where I challenge the idea of closure.

Perhaps, within the pages of this document, I should consider myself an existentialist, at least in part, where the belief is that the world is confusing and meaning not inherent. Like Sartre describes, I believe that there is subjectivity within the way each of us lives our lives, and many of the 'truths' that we perceive are a result of this internally driven perspective (1964). The essence of my 'selves' and what I have and will make of my life follows from my existence, where I first learn of myself and then choose how I want to define the concept of 'me'. So too is the process of defining my perception of and relationship with my dad, as well as my relationship to the concept of grief and bereavement, created by me from my experience. However, there is one area within my grief where I feel I differ from Sartre's existentialism. While from his perspective man lives in a sense of anguish due to the need to accept responsibility for his own actions, I believe that such responsibility can also provide a sense of empowerment. I did not despair at the loss of my father in the existential sense, because that would mean I had experienced a loss of hope (Steffen & Coyle, 2011). Though I seem to constantly trip over new questions about life and death, and seem to have fewer answers the further I go down this rabbit hole, appreciating along the way how much of this topic is simply unknowable, I have not lost hope. I still believe in the importance of engaging in relationships with important others; I believe that I can in some small way, whether through my work as a counsellor or as a supportive friend/partner/sister/daughter contribute to the positive well-being of others; and I still believe in love and I believe in life.

Kierkegaard, though a Christian, has been labeled the father of existentialism for his forward thinking philosophy (Watts, 2003). Within his writings he suggests that the

creation of meaning is unique to each individual and can be accomplished through living a passionate, authentic life determined by making conscious and responsible choices. In this manner, the loss of my father provided me a spark that helped begin a flame of making meaning within my own life, and that helped me to see that my life is worth living.

We have come to the end of our journey together and I'd like to leave you with a question. Now that you have been witness to this experience and have been part of my journey, where will you go?

*Mind and Heart – Charles Bukowski*

*unaccountably we are alone  
forever alone  
and it was meant to be  
that way,  
it was never meant  
to be any other way—  
and when the death struggle  
begins  
the last thing I wish to see  
is  
a ring of human faces  
hovering over me—  
better just my old friends,  
the walls of my self,  
let only them be there.*

*I have been alone but seldom  
lonely.  
I have satisfied my thirst  
at the well  
of my self  
and that wine was good,  
the best I ever had,  
and tonight  
sitting  
staring into the dark  
I now finally understand  
the dark and the  
light and everything  
in between.*

*peace of mind and heart  
arrives  
when we accept what  
is:  
having been  
born into this  
strange life  
we must accept  
the wasted gamble of our  
days  
and take some satisfaction in  
the pleasure of  
leaving it all  
behind.*

*cry not for me.*

*grieve not for me.*

*read  
what I've written  
then  
forget it  
all.*

*drink from the well  
of your self  
and begin  
again.*

*Of all the strange things that Alice saw in her journey Through the Looking-Glass, this was the one that she always remembered most clearly. Years afterwards she could bring the whole scene back again, as if had been only yesterday... with one hand shading her eyes, she leant against a tree, and listening, in a half-dream, to the melancholy music of the song.*

*“But the tune isn’t his own invention,” she said to herself...*

*As the Knight sang the last words of the ballad, he gathered up the reins, and turned his horse’s head along the road by which they had come. “You’ve only a few yards to go,” he said, “down the hill and over that little brook... But you’ll stay and see me off first?... I think it’ll encourage me, you see.”*

*“Of course I’ll wait,” said Alice: “and thank you very much for coming so far – and for the song – I liked it very much.”*

*“I hope so,” the Knight said doubtfully: “but you didn’t cry so much as I thought you would.”*

*So they shook hands, and then the Knight rode slowly away into the forest.*

*~ Alice Through the Looking Glass, p.179, 184-185*



### **Waking Up and Beginning to Dream – A Conclusion**

Please listen to the following track in coordination with examination of the painting *Enigmatic Evolution* that I have created to conclude my dissertation:

*Creating Meaning in the Face of Bereavement, an Adult Child's Perspective*

*Somewhere Over the Rainbow/Wonderful World – Israel Kamakawiwo'ole (Track 22)*

*Somewhere over the rainbow  
Way up high  
And the dreams that you dreamed of  
Once in a lullaby  
Somewhere over the rainbow  
Blue birds fly  
And the dreams that you dreamed of  
Dreams really do come true  
Someday I'll wish upon a star  
Wake up where the clouds are far behind me  
Where trouble melts like lemon drops  
High above the chimney top that's where you'll find me oh  
Somewhere over the rainbow bluebirds fly  
And the dream that you dare to, oh why, oh why can't I?*

*Well I see trees of green and  
Red roses too,  
I'll watch them bloom for me and you  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world*

*Well I see skies of blue and I see clouds of white  
And the brightness of day  
I like the dark and I think to myself  
What a wonderful world*

*The colors of the rainbow so pretty in the sky  
Are also on the faces of people passing by  
I see friends shaking hands  
Saying, "How do you do?"  
They're really saying, I...I love you  
I hear babies cry and I watch them grow  
They'll learn much more  
Than we'll know  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world*

*Someday I'll wish upon a star  
Wake up where the clouds are far behind me  
Where trouble melts like lemon drops  
High above the chimney top that's where you'll find me  
Oh, Somewhere over the rainbow way up high  
And the dream that you dare to, why, oh why can't I?*



*'Enigmatic Evolution'*  
by Zoë Sehn



## Appendix

All Alice in Wonderland quotes drawn from:

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Carroll, L. (2005). *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*. London: Walker Books Ltd.

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was originally published in 1865, while *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* was originally published in 1871 as *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*.

Sources for the works of Lewis Carroll above, as well as for additional poetry and musical selections (see References for Music and Poetry) have been abbreviated within the body of the text to remove excess information.

Voice recording for this project was done in conjunction with Windmill Studios, UK.



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