Potential for Personal Growth in Grief and Loss: A Personal Journey of Re-learning the

World

by

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Abstract

Grief and loss is a significant experience that can impact an individual's way of being in many areas throughout the course of their lives. An experience of loss instigates grief, and grievers process the pain and suffering of such experiences in many different ways. The message I am striving to emphasize in this document is the underlying potential of growth that comes with every loss. This thesis is an autoethnographic account of my grief and loss experience that I have come to view as a meaning making experience because of the spiritual transformation I have gone through. Throughout this document, I have described this meaning making process as my personal journey of re-learning the world. I have discovered that the journey of finding potential for personal growth in grief and loss can be an excruciatingly intense process that can spark an individual to begin a lifelong journey of finding purpose in life. I have also discovered that grief and loss has occurred in different developmental stages in my life, and that I am now entering a new stage in my journey of transformation: a stage in which I am aiming to become a helper in order to provide support to those experiencing grief and loss. In this thesis I discussed, at length, a theoretical model called the two-track model of bereavement, as well as other therapeutic interventions, that for therapists should be aware of while working with grief and loss in the field of counselling.

Key words: autoethnography, grief and loss, bereavement, meaning making, re-learning the world

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to my life by helping me start this amazing academic and lifelong journey. Thank you for

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis first and foremost to my brother, Javvad Iqbal, who is the soul, the

main essence, the drive, and the motivation behind writing this thesis. May his soul rest in peace:

He was not only a sibling, but a part of me. He will always be alive in my heart and in my

memories.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my two beautiful children, Arsal Khan and

Khadija Khan. These two little, innocent souls have been part of this journey with me throughout

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In the end, I would like to dedicate this thesis to a special friend, Christopher Creelman, who has inspired me and helped me grow on so many different levels. He has not only been a good friend, but a mentor to me: a safe and strong person I was able to look up to. I have learned how one can embrace their way of being in life from him and he has made a huge contribution in the final stages of my writing process for this thesis.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE

I am sharing a true story that is derived from my lived experiences: a story that highlights my journey of relearning the world. These lived experiences are deep – rooted in grief and loss – which illustrates a reflective theme of my life. I strive to take my readers on a journey alongside me by sharing experiences that have made me feel the most alive: Experiences filled with pain and joy, tears and laughter, and love and hatred that have led me to the path of relearning the world around me. I can imagine that this experience is going to be exhilarating for me.

As I write this thesis, I will be looking back at my past grief and loss experiences. I will be using self-reflection, as well as relevant scholarly research and related theoretical frameworks, in order to encourage a much deeper and profound understanding of grief and loss in my life. At the same time, I will be building a bridge to connect my past life to my present life. On one side of the bridge, I see myself looking back at my life in different developmental stages: a series of life events that took place on the other side of the bridge. At the same time, connecting these life experiences to my present will hopefully help readers understand the effects of my past life on my present worldview. I will strive to include my readers in this journey with me.

During this process of looking back at my life, I will primarily focus on my experiences of grief and loss. At the same time, I will strive to draw my reader's attention to the extensive potential that is present for personal growth in such experiences. Highlighting this potential is a major goal of this thesis. Overall, the process of connecting my past to my present – as well as helping my readers understand what grief and loss has offered me in terms of re-learning the world – will be discussed over the course of five chapters.

Chapter one is an introductory chapter that provides my readers with a map that illustrates different routes I have chosen to take in my life. This map will also demonstrate how choosing certain routes and directions served a purpose in my life. In addition, this chapter will introduce the methodology I have decided to use for my thesis: autoethnography. I will provide a brief introduction to the autoethnographic methodology, including main tenets, goals and critiques. I will also discuss the significance of choosing autoethnography to my document as a whole.

In Chapter Two, I will focus on my grief and loss experiences as a child and as an adolescent. I will attempt to glimpse into my early childhood; however, it is important to note that I have seemed to have lost most of my significant memories that occurred during this time... Other than a few vague recollections, I only remember my childhood after the age of seven and beyond. What happened before is a vacuum: a gap, a blank space. I will share with you, my readers, what this experience means to me in relation to grief and loss. I will also describe my personal loss of freedom due to the social and cultural values that were present when I was a young girl. In this chapter, I will also discuss my personal experience of loss of connection with my parents and most of my family members as an adolescent: the result of my struggle for autonomy and my desire to fit in. In addition, I will share how the experiences that occurred during my early years have strongly impacted my journey of finding true meaning in life.

In Chapter Three, I will include a collection of memories from my adult years which revolve around my experiences of loss. One of the most intense experiences was the loss of my only attachment figure: my older brother who died at a very young age. My grieving process in that stage was what I would now call invisible grieving. Grieving alone and in silence – and not

being able to share the effects of a significant loss – is what I have termed invisible grieving. I will also strive to demonstrate how such an intense experience of grief and loss ultimately led to personal growth as I searched to find a path toward healing.

In Chapter Three, I will also elaborate on my process of creating a deeper, stronger connection with my inner self. I will then share with you, my readers, how going through such agonizing experiences sparked a part of my inner soul which ultimately motivated me to dedicate my life to finding true meaning and inner peace. As Darya (2015) eloquently stated, "Grief is infinitely powerful to connect us not only to others but also to the lost and forgotten parts of ourselves. It makes us whole again" (p. 2). n this third chapter, again, I will be linking the impact of my past experiences to my present life. At the same time, I will integrate literature from scholarly resources into my story, focusing primarily on relevant research regarding grief and loss; however, I will also include literature that supports the main essence of this thesis: the potential for personal growth after experiencing grief and loss. In my understanding, the process of integrating research into a life story is like opening up space for uniquely different perspectives. This process also offers a profound understanding of ones lived experiences. Overall, I am calling this process a personal journey of re-learning the world.

In Chapter Four, I will focus primarily on the process of personal growth that occurred underneath my pain and suffering. I will strive to connect these profound experiences to a theoretical framework. In Chapter Five, I will summarize my key themes and bring this entire experience to an end. I will write about what this thesis has hopefully offered to my readers. This last chapter will express that, for me, writing this thesis was not just an academic piece of work that I was responsible to write and complete before an allocated final date. I will be putting my

heart and soul into this piece of work. I am not writing this document purely to compose a nicely

processed academic thesis. I am writing as an artist who paints on a canvas that is inspired by

life, as well as the loss of life: an artist who sometimes throws colours, while other times uses

softer strokes. I will write this last chapter not only as a graduate student but also as a future

professional counsellor, potential educator, and writer as well. In this chapter, my story will come

to an end as I paint a path to a new beginning. This chapter contains a message for my readers: a

message that draws attention to what people can gain when they lose, a message that shows the

hidden signs of new beginnings in every ending. I can also integrate what I have learned

throughout this entire process to my work as a counsellor since I am passionate to work with

clients who have experienced grief and loss.

In each chapter, I strive to share my life experiences. I also hope to present creative ways

in which my readers can learn how emotions can be expressed and processed through writing.

Using writing in this manner is somewhat similar to what researchers have called expressive

writing. According to Kerner and Fitzpatrick (2007), expressive writing is the term most often

cited by researchers who investigate the physical and psychological benefits of emotional

disclosure. Expressive writing, also called therapeutic writing, can facilitate the cognitive

changes that create coherence and can help to make meaning out of stressful life events (Kerner

& Fitzpatrick, 2007). As I begin the process of writing this thesis, I believe I will see, first hand,

the benefits of expressive writing, particularly in terms of processing grief and loss experiences.

Within this process, one can be encouraged to write or think about new stories in which their

problem no longer has power over his/her life (Kerner & Fitzpatrick, 2007). For the purpose of

this thesis, I have decided to call the process of deconstructing my painful memories to

something meaningful as 'relearning the world'.

Autoethnographic Methodology

In order to accomplish my goal of sharing this meaningful journey with my readers, I am

writing an autoethnography since this methodology is found to be an effective way to examine

one's subjective reality. Autoethnography is a newer development in ethnographic inquiry, in

which a researcher's own thoughts and perspectives from their social interactions form the

central element of a study (Ellis and Adams, 2014). According to Ellis and Bochner (2000),

"autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (*graphy*), on culture (*ethno*),

and on self (*auto*)" such that "different exemplars of autoethnography fall at different places

along the continuum of each of these three axes" (p.740).

A major goal of the autoethnographic methodology is to produce meaningful, accessible,

and evocative research grounded in personal experience (Ellis and Adams, 2014). DeLeon (2010)

has identified autoethnography as a therapeutic way to explore the past. Autoethnographers are

able to bring legitimacy to an ancient way of telling stories using narrative inquiry in the

development of human knowledge (Pagnucci, 2004, as cited in DeLeon, 2010). This research

method is distinctive from others in three ways: it is qualitative, self-focused, and context-

conscious (Chang, 2007; Denzin, 2006; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000 as cited in Ngunjiri,

Hernandez, & Chang, 2010).

As researchers begin the process of writing an autoethnography, autoethnographers

recognize the innumerable ways personal experience can influence their research process (Ellis

& Adams, 2014). In autoethnography, authors do not live through the experiences solely to make

themselves part of the final published document; rather, some of these experiences are assembled using hindsight (Burner, 1993; Denzin, 1989, Freeman, 2004, as cited in Ellis and Adams, 2014). The process of analyzing ethnographic data tends to be undertaken in an inductive thematic manner: The key issues emerging from the data are examined, identified, and categorized into themes. Through a careful analysis of their data, using this inductive process, ethnographers generate tentative theoretical explanations from their empirical work (Ellis and Adams, 2014).

My recollection of memories in different developmental stages related to my lived experiences is the main source of data for this autoethnography. I will focus primarily on my experiences related to grief and loss in order to capture and present the main themes of my life so far. My journals and writing samples will also serve as data for this autoethnography.

 In an autoethnography, telling is a writing strategy that works with showing, and, in this story, the reader is able to distance themselves from the events described so that they are able to think about the events in a more abstract way (Ellis and Adams, 2014). I anticipate that my experience of writing this autoethnography will be somewhat like watching a movie of my own life in a large movie theatre where I am the only person sitting in the audience: my life playing on the big screen as I stay at a distance from my past. The movie begins with my childhood and works its way to my adolescent and adult years, primarily focusing on grief and loss experiences that bring me right to my present life. I anticipate that I will be able to distance myself from my past life experiences because I will be watching my life as a member of the audience: the sole member. It seems as if I will be a movie character that is different from the Hufsa who is sitting in the theatre.

When I finish the movie and walk out of the theatre, I can imagine that I will feel as if I have a more profound and deeper understanding of my life from the standpoint of a viewer. As I mentioned earlier, I believe I will look back at my life that was lived on the other side of the bridge while I connect my past to my present as well. At the same time, I will go deep into my experiences to reflect upon my life and tell my story to you, my readers. I will strive not only to develop a deeper understanding of myself and others but also being able to articulate and integrate this learning into my professional life as I become a counsellor. Hughes (2008) argued that "Autoethnography may teach us about self in that it challenges our assumptions of normalcy, forces us to be more self-reflexive, and instructs us about our professional and personal socialization." (p. 127). Personal narratives propose to understand a self, or some aspects of life, as it intersects within a cultural context, connects to other participants as co-researchers, and invites readers to enter the author's world. Autoethnographers are encouraged to use what they have learned within the writing process to reflect on, to understand, and to cope with their own lives in a more effective manner (Ellis, 2004).

When I picture my readers as they sit down to read my document, I imagine each set of eyes peering into a door that I have opened just for them: a door that allows each of my readers to enter my world and to stay for a while. One way to encourage my readers to become immersed in my journey is by sharing a series of personal narratives that I will be able to compose by referring to my journals. These journals have been written in different stages of my life, especially in the last few years. Kerner and Fitzpatrick (2007) indicated that one can develop a profound and deeper understanding of their lived experiences through journaling, which can result in the person feeling optimistic and empowered, as well as increasing their ability to

recognize their personal strengths. Writing personal stories is also a way to facilitate the process of externalizing and re-authoring one's self-narratives. And, for the purpose of this thesis, I describe this process as re-learning the world. The goal of this process is not only to understand one's emotions, but also to understand their life stories from a different perspective (McArdle & Byrt, 2001).

Autoethnographers not only try to make personal experiences meaningful and cultural experiences engaging, but, by producing accessible texts, autoethnographers also have an opportunity to reach wider and more diverse audiences that can encourage personal and social change for a wide variety of people (Bochner, 1997; Ellis, 1995; Goodall, 2006; Hooks, 1994, in Ellis and Adams, 2014). Thus, the autoethnographic approach is unique in its way of doing and treating research as a political, socially-just, and socially-conscious act (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011).

Even though I am fascinated and thrilled to learn more about autoethnography in order to share my story in what I believe to be the most creative way possible, it is important to note that every methodology has some limitations; therefore, I would like to share a brief critique of the autoethnographic methodology with my readers. According to Holt (2003), in the autoethnographic tradition, the use of the investigator's *self* as the focus of the research can be problematic. This problematic nature of self-as-the-only-data-source is complicated because qualitative researchers have long been encouraged to consider how their personal subjectivity influences their investigative process (Holt, 2003). Accordingly, autoethnographies have been criticized for being too self-indulgent and narcissistic (Coffey, 1999, as cited in Holt, 2003).

In my understanding, there is great value in having an opportunity to develop a profound understanding of my relationship to myself and to others by using an autoethnographic methodology. I believe that what affects and touches my life also touches a number of lives that are connected to me. I am not only a graduate student, but I am also a mother, a friend, a sister, a daughter, a lover, a peer, a neighbor, and a responsible and faithful member of my community. Thus, I believe that having an investment in myself not only affects me deeply, but everyone who is connected to me as well. I believe that presenting myself as a source of data is much more valuable than it is problematic, despite the critiques described above. By investing a great deal of time and effort in writing stories about their lives, I feel as if autoethnographers have the ability to benefit greatly in their futures: both personally and professionally, and individually and relationally. According to Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang (2010), autoethnography allows researchers to dig deeply into their own experience. Autoethnographers are given an opportunity to include their attendant emotions in ways that may not be possible if they were being interviewed by someone else.

Additionally, verification issues related to methodology and representation in autoethnography are criticized. The research questions in an autoethnography – when compared to traditional criteria used for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research questions – raises issues related to validity and reliability of the research (Holt, 2003). Autoethnographers also recognize that what is understood and referred to as "truth" changes as the genre of writing or representing experience changes (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). It is also recognized that memory is fallible; therefore, it is not possible to recall or report events in language that exactly represents how those events were lived and felt. Moreover, people who have experienced the

"same" event often tell different stories about what happened (Owen et al., 2009 as cited in Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Ultimately, what matters the most to me is keeping in mind that the written document might be different from what was experienced in a different time and space; however, due to the reflective nature of autoethnography, the author is able to learn from their experiences and gain a greater understanding of their life. At the same time, I believe that the focus needs to be on what a reader may gain while relating to the author's true story, rather than on the loss that the writing process may cause.

According to Ngunjiri et al.(2010), autoethnography can encourage empathy and connection beyond the self of the author and can contribute to sociological understandings; however, the focus and involvement of others in autoethnographic writing draws attention to a primary ethical concern discussed in the literature. Specifically, researchers have highlighted the challenge of telling their stories in light of representing others in that story –such as stories of pain, hurt, betrayal, family drama, and loss that may include other members such as parents, siblings, and colleagues (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). In other words, the focus on self does not necessary mean "self in a vacuum." A variety of others –"others of similarity" (those with similar values and experiences to self), "others of difference" (those with different values and experiences from self), and "others of opposition" (those with values and experiences seemingly irreconcilable to self) are often present in stories about self (Chang, 2008, as cited in Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010, p. 3). I have handled this ethical concern long before writing even my first chapter by having a detailed conversation with my family and friends who may be involved and are part of my story, especially those who have been a significant part of my personal learning and growth.

A passage written by Dauphinee (2010) strongly resonates with me at this point in my writing journey:

> If we do not show our motives, they cannot be evaluated by other readers. I write out of love. I sometimes write out of guilt. In all cases, I write because I become aware that something is not the way I thought it was. Something has hurt me. Something has made me angry or sleepless or aggrieved in some way. I don't think the fact that I have personal motivations that orient me toward the political world I study is particularly unique. However, my account of my relationships cannot be considered to uniquely authorize me as a speaking, knowing agent because of the depth of my emotional experience (p. 8).

My Understanding of Autoethnography

In this section, I will share with you, my readers, what writing an autoethnography means to me and why I picked this methodology to share my life story. When I was first introduced to the idea that there was a way to pass on the messages life has taught me, in the form of a story, I was thrilled and fascinated. I was excited that I had finally found a way to share my story with others: a story written by someone who has come from a diverse background: a story written by someone who has learned from a wide range of life experiences: a story written by someone who has gained enlightening perspectives from these unique moments in time. I am someone who has always been a storyteller, but I have never had an opportunity to accumulate a series of my stories and shape them in the form of one document. At the same time, before writing this thesis, I had a very limited understanding of an autoethnographic methodology. I spent a significant amount of time reading about the approach, as well as grasping the philosophy behind writing an autoethnography. In addition, discussing the autoethnographic methodology with my peers and

teachers, as well my copy editor, who is an amazing writer, helped me understand the approach in a deeper, more meaningful way.

So, why did I choose to write an autoethnography? As I look back at my life, I have realized that my experiences of loss have offered me a rich learning experience: an experience that helped me define who I am today. Writing an autoethnography will give me an opportunity to travel back and forth in time, accessing parts of myself that I have almost forgotten: the forgotten parts that have helped me build my strength along the way in this lifetime journey. I will acknowledge these moments by sharing them with you, my readers, and re living them through my writing. I also see writing an autoethnography as a process of making the implicit explicit: I hope that what has been unsaid will be said. I hope that what is unheard will be heard. This story is not just about sharing a single incident or a particular event. Rather, this story is about creating new meaning from what is gone and what was lived long ago: this story is about re-learning the world from what I have learned and repeated many times. As I think about the entire writing process ahead of me, what resonates with me the most is that an autoethnography is, in my opinion, the best possible way that I can capture my story and share it with others.

I wish for you, my readers, to enter my world and to travel through my life with me. I hope that you will walk away with a rich learning experience. I see myself becoming a host, opening a door to my life and letting you in. I wish to gently offer my gifts through my writing to you. By sharing my life experiences, it is my hope that each of my readers will have an opportunity to get to know me: I wish for each of you to build a connection with the person behind this document.

At the same time, you, my readers, might relate to my story in a way that helps you understand your own struggles in life. Perhaps my story will help you believe that you are not alone in your fights. It is also my hope that you might be encouraged to write your own stories and share these lived experiences with others too. Ultimately, I believe that writing this document can be an absolutely meaningful process: not only for me, but for you too. Throughout these pages, I will be sharing the moments that have made me feel the most alive in order to make this experience more than just reading a document. I am planning to treat you, my readers, like guests. You are more than just readers to me. Throughout this thesis, I will be building a web of connections: a web that reflects togetherness: a web that provides each of you with an opportunity to go through this journey of re-learning the world with me.

At the same time, I am also concerned because I have never given anyone access to my stories before. I know that I am taking a courageous step as I make my personal life public after making the decision to write an autoethnography. I recognize that this fear is genuine because I am sharing my lived experiences with strangers. I do not know who my readers are and how my story will impact them. I am aware that just like me, you, my readers, are also investing your time and energy in reading this document. I acknowledge my fear and anxiety in sharing my personal life, yet I am making an authentic effort to pass on a message of love, hope, and healing through this document. And, it is my hope that you will continue to pass on this message to others.

Next, I would like you, my readers, to imagine a tree standing tall with deep roots and wide spread branches. This tree provides shade and shelter to anyone and everyone. What is the story behind this tall, shaded tree? The first step was when a seed was planted. As a future

helping professional, I picture myself similar to a tree: grounded –standing strong and tall in the most humble way – and providing support through my work to help people heal. Here, I feel like it is important that I briefly mention the beginning of my journey: when a seed was planted. In order to become a helping professional, I started my journey by joining Vancouver Community College. During this time, roughly four years ago, I completed a certificate program in counselling. And, it was also during this time that I was first introduced to the idea of self-reflection while writing personal journals. In these entries, I was encouraged to focus on and invest in the process of finding purpose and meaning in life through personal growth.

After a seed is planted, the next step is to water the plant so it can be nourished and grow. For me, the nourishment and growth of my soul happened when I started to understand what inspired me and helped me grow. This journey of intense personal growth started as I became a Master of Counselling student at City University of Seattle in Vancouver, Canada. During my first academic year as a grad student, I underwent extensive self-transformation. I was immersed in the process of doing personal inner work: I integrated my lived experiences with scholarly research, and linked these experiences to different theoretical perspectives. Overall, I would call this entire experience my journey of self-transformation.

As I begin the process of writing this autoethnography, I am taking the same avenue as I did while writing an inner work paper, yet, on a much broader and larger scale. Rather than relating to and reflecting upon one past life experience, I will be combining a series of life experiences that have occurred in different developmental stages and relating these moments to my present life. I will be focusing on personal growth in grief and loss experiences, and, as I have stated previously, I am calling this process 're-learning the world.' I invite you, my readers,

to witness the unfolding of this entire process in each upcoming chapter. I am striving to write

the next four chapters in a way that you can imagine a seed becoming a plant, and then the plant

turning into a tall, shaded tree. This tree will be me: the author of this story. I will share what

means the most to me: becoming a helper to share my energy, while offering my gifts and

passing on a message of love, hope, and healing.

CHAPTER TWO

In this chapter I will focus on describing the grief and loss I experienced during my childhood and adolescent years. I will not only share my losses but I will also highlight my learning and what I gained from those experiences. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to the other side of the bridge I have mentioned in the first chapter: The other side of the bridge that joins my past to my present. I wish to connect these experiences to each other, as well as to the life I have yet to live – my future. I hope to share powerful insights I have made with you, my readers. I wish for you to witness the process of unfolding messages of love and hope, strength and resilience, and compassion and kindness that are hidden underneath every loss that has happened in my past life. It is my hope that you will come to understand how my present acknowledges my past.

Another significant part of looking back at my life from where I am right now is to also recognize and distinguish between what I actually view while peeking into my past and what I expect to view: even if I am aware that I have no control over changing my past. My past is what has happened to me in a different time and space, yet glimpses from this time make me wonder about a significant piece that seems to be missing. What is missing is myself being a child? What is missing is my childhood memories, other than some blurred flashbacks? What is missing is me in a different time and space? When I look back, I expect to see a little girl running around in her shorts, carefree with giggles and laughter. This girl is full of life, showing her innocence without impurities sneaking into her life from the world around her. This little girl was oftentimes wild like the waves of the ocean and soft like the gentle breeze of a spring morning. This girl is what I expect to view in these flashbacks to my past: a time that is called childhood.

In this moment, as I write about how I expect to view my childhood, lyrics from a song come to mind, echoing in my ears:

You are born to dance to the beat with your own heart

to roam without cages,

with the innocence of a child and the free spirit of untamed horses

I hope you laugh without stopping

live with abandon and love like it's all there is…

stay wild my wild wild child… (Chesney, 2015).

I wonder where that wild child is. And, I ask myself: What do I view every time I look back? I see a blank space, just like an empty wide gap. I ask myself again: Where is that little girl? From my view now, there is no one there. What happened to her? I know what she looks like, since my mom kept a number of photographs from my childhood. But, even if I know what she looks like, I do not remember anything about what it felt like to be that girl. I worry about her: How could I have lost her? I worry about that lost child and the missing childhood memories. Why do I not remember the touch of my mother's hands and the feeling of her skin, her cuddles, and her warmth? How come I have no memory of holding my father's hands and feeling bigger than everyone around me? I have a number of questions about this missing piece of my life that is so significant. I see this missing piece as a loss. And, now, I am about to share my story that connects my present to my past grief and loss experiences.

The biggest question I have related to this lived experience is: How do I relate to a significant part of my life or access my childhood memories when I have a blank space instead of where my childhood should be? According to Fredrickson (2000), individuals often predict

their future happiness based on their past affective experiences that include emotions, moods, and other subjective states like pleasure and pain, liking and disliking, hope and dread. People extract meaning from these past affective experiences to make choices about their future (Fredrickson, 2000). But, I wonder: How am I supposed to make those choices when there is nothing to remember or nothing to relate to other than some faint flashbacks? How do I make sense of my present when the most memorable time of my life is similar to a blank space, a wide gap?

While I am re-living and re-witnessing this blank space in my life by writing this autoethnography, I also want to draw my reader's attention to what I call 'gain in every loss': a potential for personal growth beneath difficult times. Constructivist theories propose that the process by which bereaved persons question, find and make sense of their loss is central to the experience of grief (Neimeyer, 2000 in Gillies & Niemeyer, 2006). According to Attig (2001), "grieving is a journey of the heart that brings us to the fullness of life in the flesh and blood, here and now, and into the future with those who still share the earth with us" (p. 52). The path that led me to this new insight – exploring potential for growth in this loss – started with a question: Is having no connection with my childhood a loss or a sense of liberation? If it was the latter, having a sense of liberation has motivated me to stay in the present so that I could find meaning in what life has brought me, driving me deeper into the process of re-learning the world. If it was the prior, focusing only on a sense of loss could keep me stuck in my past. For me, living in the past seemed to be like living in a life that was frozen, and the true meaning of living could disappear underneath the pain of loss and suffering. Focusing only on my losses could then create such a negative energy that could keep me from being able to move past the loss.

When I started asking these questions, I was confused, uncomfortable, and, to some extent, bewildered and exhausted. I was searching for answers all around me. What I found interesting, a fact that I feel I must share with you, my readers, is this: I realized that all of the answers were within me. This experience is what Echart Tolle (2004) called 'inner stillness', for "within [this] inner stillness there is subtle but intense joy, there is love, there is peace" (p. 29). While experiencing inner stillness, I found a way to connect to my inner self, or my felt-sense. Now I would like to share with you, my readers, how this process of connection unfolded for me.

In order to describe my relationship with my felt sense, I feel it is necessary that I reflect upon my time spent in the beginning of 2015 in Professor Larry Green's class during my first year of graduate school at City University. During that time, I was introduced to the notion of felt sense in a unique way, as well as ways that I could stay connected to my felt sense in my day to day life. Collette (2015) described spirit as a felt sense of connection, as though it is something that could be sensed in the physical body. Some other terms used for felt sense are "true self," "connection with the rest of existence," "inner resource," "inner reference," "heartfelt desire," "purpose," and "love." (Collete, 2015, p.55). For me, staying close to my felt sense has been a way to connect to my inner true self: a way to find meaning in life, a way to find potential for personal growth underneath every experience of loss. According to Frankyl (1984), once an individual's search for a meaning is successful, it not only renders this person happy but also gives them capability to cope with suffering. One day I came to this understanding when I was moved by having a dialogue with my felt sense.

In one of my journals, I wrote a dialogue when, for the first time in years, I heard my felt sense whispering into my ears, "Hello there,…"

My felt-sense: What is going on? Why do I have to be active all the time?

Me: I want you to stay active so that I can stay close to my true self.

My felt-sense: But I am scared and exhausted. I came out of a shell after a long struggle, so why do I need to come alive and be with you all the time?

Me: It's time not to hide, but to celebrate your existence, my existence, by embracing vulnerability. It is an opportunity to nurture and develop a new and healthy relationship with you. Would you let me?

When I started paying close attention to this voice coming from inside, and to these inner dialogues I was having with myself, I was able to externalize some of these experiences. I found a number of ways to facilitate this externalizing process. I would write in journals and draw on a piece of paper with random colours. Sometimes I would even verbalize my processing when I had a safe space to discuss these thoughts and feelings. Sharing some of these experiences has been a major part of relearning the world around me. Altogether, this process seemed to be the beginning of a never ending journey of finding peace and uncovering a path to healing: a journey of finding potential for personal growth and finally, a journey to connect to my inner true and authentic self. This entire process of connecting to my true self has enabled me to access certain parts of me that I have not visited in a long time. Connecting to my authentic self has opened up the doors to the paths of self- growth that I have blocked. I blocked these paths for so long so that I could survive in the world. Throughout my coursework, I had the opportunity to write a number of inner work papers, and I composed a caption that I used more than once because of its

deep meaning to me: "A journey from shame and fear, to vulnerability, and to the birth of joy, love, creativity, and worthiness: a new life evolving every single moment to celebrate its existence" (Iqbal, 2015).

This caption not only highlighted most of my inner work writing in academic documents, but it has also highlighted the majority of my personal life. In one of Brown's (2013) articles she said, "our capacity of wholeheartedness can never be greater than our willingness to be broken hearted" (p. 2). Yes, I am willing to be broken hearted since broken hearts are what life has offered me every time I went through an experience of loss. Yes, I embrace vulnerability as it is a birth of joy, love, and creativity. What I am finding underneath is my wholeheartedness and willingness to connect to myself first, and then to the world around me. In every single moment of my life I aim to fully live and to find ways to pass on a message of hope to others. There are many experiences that have enabled me to find ways to stay connected to my true core self.

At this point I would like to share with you one of those profound experiences that occurred during my schooling in 2015. During this experience, I was encouraged to connect to my inner self, and, through that connection, I was able to connect to the lost child I have previously mentioned. I was invited to attend a workshop hosted by City University professor, Avraham Cohen, and his wife, Hesson Bai. The title of the workshop was "Enlightenment as 21st Century Psychotherapy: A Guide to Post-egoic Human Development and Holistic Integration." In this one-day workshop, a number of unique and innovative philosophies were introduced. But, more importantly, participants were encouraged to work together in order to engage in practices that aimed to facilitate consciousness shifting that had healing potential. There were also

opportunities for development of dialogic consciousness through inner work and community

development.

Throughout the day, there were a number of demonstrations, as well as guided practices

that integrated meditation with psychological inner work. Each exercise was conducted in a

relational field. The day started with a meditation, and participants were asked to connect to their

inner child. They were asked to feel their inner child's presence within them as an adult and to

try to pay close attention to what their inner child was trying to communicate to them. As a

participant who was deeply involved in a process of writing about her childhood – concerned

about her missing childhood memories and finding ways to connect to that missing piece in her

life – I started meditating. I was a bit anxious, but I was well aware of my anxiety. I also

anticipated that I would find an empty space during that meditation, and, sure enough, that is

exactly what happened during my experience. I could not connect to my inner child. I could just

sense an empty gap. In that moment, I realized that before I attempted to connect to my inner

child, I needed to find her first.

I searched and searched inside me, but there was nothing but an empty space. There were

thoughts, distractions, and ideas: a lot was happening within that space. I was unable to share my

experience, but I listened to others who shared some very heartwarming, profound experiences

during meditation. An atmosphere was created with a strong sense of warmth and safety where a

lot of people could open up in front of a large crowd. However, I stayed blank and felt quite

empty: I did not know if I would be able to meet my inner child.

As the day went by, I noticed that something was shifted in me. During the last half of the

afternoon, meditation was offered again. Participants were asked to either imagine or to look

inside during meditation whether they can make their adult being connect and communicate with the inner child. I started to meditate, expecting that I would have a somewhat similar experience to the one I had earlier in the morning. During the afternoon meditation, I could see a dark room with a white light only in the middle of the room. I could see my adult being in a chair, and, right in front of me, there was a little girl: a five year old little girl who looked carefree. She had a big smile on her face, and was wearing a pink sweater with a yellow and pink design in the middle, pink pajamas, and a pink toque: she was all pink. Instantly, I remembered that my mom had a picture of me with my family in which I was wearing the same outfit: all pink. I was so absorbed during that meditation. I did not want to open my eyes: I did not want to lose that little girl I finally found after so many years.

In the meditation, as I peered upon this little girl, I asked a simple question in a concerned voice, "How are you doing"? She looked at me with big brown eyes full of curiosity and the most innocent smile and said, "I am good, I am just fine." She nodded her head, confirming that she was alright. She also shook her shoulders a little bit as if she was saying, "Why wouldn't I be alright?" She gently swung her legs: It looked like she was enjoying the spontaneous movements in her body. When I opened my eyes after the meditation, I felt relieved. It was as if pounds and pounds of weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I felt as I was strongly connected to my inner self and was enlightened. I shared my experience with my fellow participants in the activity, as well as with everyone in the audience. I wanted to include my whole helper's community in my process. The presenter, Avraham, after listening to me very carefully, mentioned that, "It seems as your consciousness is fully alive in these moments".

The reason I shared this experience with you, my readers, is to explain how I gained a sense of enlightenment as I attempted to find my lost self. And, ultimately, this experience lead to the potential for further personal growth. In later chapters, I will touch upon the concept of connecting to oneself and one's inner child, and how I intend to incorporate this practice into my future work as a counsellor.

Before I move on to share my experiences of grief and loss in the next developmental stage, adolescence, I would like to give, you, my readers, an overview of my cultural background. I have an ability to look at the world from a diverse set of lenses, since I am a member of a different culture and ethnic group. I feel it is important for you, my readers, to have a greater understanding of my background because some of my grief and loss experiences that occurred during my childhood and adolescence have a strong connection with my upbringing and some of the cultural norms of the society I grew up in. I lived a large portion of my life in my country of birth, Pakistan, and I have been living in Canada for the last 13 years.

 I grew up in an upper middle class Muslim family from Pakistan. I am the second youngest in the family, with two sisters and two brothers. My father was a general practitioner and my mother was a gynecologist, and they had a very devoted and loving companionship for almost 40 years until my father passed away a few years ago. They were very dedicated to their professions and were high achievers; thus, education was an important value in my family. Having a degree was not only mandatory, but it was also a standard to earn my parent's love and respect.

At the same time, I always found myself struggling to fit in according to the standard of what is considered 'normal' in my culture. It seemed as if my purpose in life revolved around

either reward or punishment. Even if my parents were educated, the cultural and familial values present in our society provided little room for an adolescent like me: someone who wanted to explore life with a different perspective. Even from a young age I had a number of questions about every rule that was imposed, either as an honour and respect for religion or culture. I always felt as if my family never accepted or understood who I was and what I wanted to become.

In relation to my grief and loss experiences, I remember my first loss in detail. This loss was due to the society I was living in. As an early adolescent, I lost all of my close, beloved friends. I was a Tomboy kind of girl who used to love playing with boys since Barbie dolls were boring and not that exciting for me. As a child, playing with boys was acceptable until the age of puberty, but I could never understand why boys and girls were forced to attend separate schools after grade 5. This policy resulted in a huge loss for me, since all of my friends who were boys had to go to a different school. And, along these lines, I was told numerous times while growing up that sex or any physical contact with males was strictly prohibited in my religion. My parents were also strong believers of that faith and I was told when I was almost 12 that I needed to limit my social interaction with all of my male friends and cousins. I remember my frustration and anger towards my parents and I struggled with those rules that were imposed without an explanation.

One way I was able to express my anger and frustration was by becoming a rebellious teenager. On one hand, I remember being isolated in those younger years; however, on the other hand, losing ties with my family was a huge loss. I felt like I always waited for someone to notice me and for someone to pay attention to my frustration, but it seemed as if I never existed

to those around me. I remember that it seemed easy for my parents to me: their child who was always called either a 'trouble maker' or 'different' from others. According to Joyce (2012), primary caregivers' sense of ethnic identity and religiosity directly impacts how they choose to culturally socialize their children, which, in turn, influences adolescent identity development.

Every passing year was causing more distance between me and my family; thus, I was scared of being alone and was hanging on to my friends since they always accepted me for who I was. I feel as I have am still grieving to this day. I still grieve the loss of a strong connection with my immediate family. And, ultimately, I was unable to build a sense of trust that a young girl desperately needed. According to Erikson (1950), one of the developmental stages is called identity achievement vs role confusion, which occurs during the adolescent years. Erikson (1950) also suggested that the early stages of psychosocial development are greatly influenced by primary caregivers (Jones, Vaterlaus, Jackson, & Morrill, 2014).

In this moment, as I look at the other side of the bridge, I also recognize what I have learned from those younger years that define who I am today. I realize that I went through a tremendous amount of pain from being isolated during my younger years; however, I recognize that this pain strengthened me as a person. I learned how to find my way in chaos. Even if I was called a rebellious adolescent, there was some room behind that label that allowed me to find a path that guided me toward peace and contentment in my life during those years.

Looking back on the other side of the bridge, this process of finding my strength exhibits empowerment and resilience no matter what life offered me. My behaviours, to some extent, were a clear signal that I had to choose my own path and find my real self that can only be defined by me. Today, after starting a lifelong journey of finding true meaning, I find myself in

the action stage of change. I am ready to take responsibility for my life rather than holding on to my past and what was lost; I am focusing on what I gained. I truly believe that my life long journey will involve continuing to work toward my goal of finding true meaning in life that is always hidden underneath a loss for me. Here I would also like to share another personal experience during my adolescent years reflecting my ability to find potential underneath what was called a troublesome behaviour.

During my adolescent years, I remember running compulsively every time something disturbing or anxiety provoking happened to me. I used to dissociate myself from the world around me and would run as fast as I could: I was running away from reality. During those years I ran because the pain of not being accepted was unbearable. I ran because the world around me was loud and chaotic. Yet, I have been able to build strength, and today I have become a marathon runner. When I crossed the finish line just recently after running my first half marathon, I was screaming with joy and my eyes were full of tears. I feel as though I was not able to run this 21.1 km marathon because of the months of training I endured, rather I felt – in that moment as I passed the finish line – that I was able to run the 21.1 km because of the training my life experiences have given me.

In my younger years, I continuously ran away from reality and pain; however, today I am running towards a reality: A reality that is unfolding in every coming moment of my life: a reality that is sometimes wrapped under a moment full of joy and other times under a painful moment of grief and loss. I find peace and search for meaning in every moment. This is my life and I welcome every moment with an open heart and mind. I welcome happiness and joy, and I allow myself to sit with the pain of loss so I can grow and learn from what is lost. The ability to

evolve after a loss is the message I am trying to pass on to you, my readers, and this journey of

growth is the essence and soul of this thesis. The next chapter will reflect on my grief and loss

experiences in the next developmental stage that are my adult years and what was lost and gained

during those years will be highlighted focusing on my journey of re-learning the world.

CHAPTER THREE

I have lived on the lip of insanity, wanting to know reasons, knocking on a door. It opens. I have

been knocking from the inside.   ~ (Rumi,1995).

In this chapter, I am aiming to hold a gentle space for myself in order to share my

experiences related to grief and loss with you, my readers. My learning from these experiences

has unfolded in many ways throughout the course of my life. During these grief and loss

experiences, my soul was bruised repeatedly. Not only did I lose everything I had, but I felt as if

part of me completely died. In this chapter, I would also like to share with you, my readers, how

I managed to keep my heart open and sat in fire with myself. This fire was caused by the

agonizing pain of grief and loss, and, rather than the flames burning my soul, the flames became

a torch: a lantern to show me the path every time there was complete darkness in life. I would

like to tell you how I gathered the broken pieces of my heart and discovered that love and

kindness was the only way to reach the road of healing. I would like to describe to you how

others involved in my life were able to hold me gently and put me back together every time I fell

apart. And, finally, I would like to share with you how I gained the strength to access the fire

within me – a fire that was much more intense than the fire that surrounded me – and how the

inner fire enlightened my soul and showed me a path towards healing.

In the previous chapter, I provided you, my readers, with an overview of my family and

cultural background. I mentioned my relationship with my family, especially with my parents,

and shared my grief and loss experiences that occurred during my childhood and adolescent

years within my family system. I also shared how I have gained strength and meaning from each

of those losses. Now I will begin this chapter by sharing my experiences in the next developmental stage: adulthood.

I would like to mention the loss of one person who meant the whole world to me: my older brother who was almost eight years older than me. I lost my brother when he was only 29 years old. He was a soldier and died in a political war in my home country of Pakistan. Losing my brother was one of the most intense experiences of grief and loss that has occurred in my life, since he was my only positive attachment figure throughout my childhood, adolescence, and the beginning of my adulthood. My brother was a strong and kind-hearted man who took care of everyone around him. He was the only person who had the capacity to contain my energy and to hold a safe space for me where I could process the bittersweet realities of life. He was my safe haven because of his kind and gentle nature and I could be who I was around him. He was also my safe haven because of his ability to stay open and non-judgmental: He would always listen rather than imposing rules and telling me what to do. He was my role model, my mentor, and my friend, as well as a bridge between me and my parents. Words cannot realistically capture the grief and loss my family and I had to deal with after his death.

Attachment and Loss

After losing my one and only positive attachment figure, I was scared and I felt completely alone in the world. It is important to note that I developed an insecure attachment style during the early years of my life because of my relationship with my parents who were my main caregivers. Some significant factors were my authoritarian-style upbringing, inconsistent availability of caregivers for warmth and support, as well not being able to feel heard and accepted, all this together resulted in developing what could be called *insecure attachment*.

Therefore, as I stated earlier, my brother was the only one who could serve as a main, positive attachment figure for me.

According to Bowlby (1982), attachment relationships generate both immediate and enduring effects on the developing individual. Pietromonaco and Barrett (2000) stated that humans form close emotional bonds in the interest of survival. These bonds facilitate the development and maintenance of mental representations of the self and others, or "internal working models." These are the models in which a person relies upon to construct a basic theory of self, other, and the world (Bowlby, 1973). The working models concept is a foundational component of John Bowlby's attachment theory as applied to both children and adults (Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000). Such models develop from a person's experience with primary attachment figures, most notably one's relationship to their parents (Neimeyer, Prigerson, and Davies, 2002). In my experience, I feel as if my relationship with my brother may have been the base of development of my internal working models, since he was the only positive attachment figure in my life. Bowlby (1982) also described internal working models that function as "cognitive maps" in the brain, and these maps are accessed "to transmit, store, and manipulate information that helps making predictions as to how set-goals (of attachment) can be achieved" (p. 80).

According to Neimeyer, Prigerson, and Davies (2002), sometimes the insecure working models of self, others, and the world heighten the potential for survivors to perceive the death of a primary attachment figure as a threat to their safety and security. In my understanding, learning about these working models in relation to grief and loss is very important. This learning also sheds light on how losing a close attachment figure can impact one's grieving process, as well as

their future relationships to the world around them. Attachment theory implies that the loss of an attachment figure will be an important and deeply troubling event, especially if there are levels of emotional dependency involved (Beder, 2005). Before I move on to sharing my individual grieving process and my journey towards healing, I will first share my family's grieving process that greatly impacted my experience of grief and loss as well my journey towards healing.

Grief and Loss in a Family System

In this section, I am going to describe the grieving process of my family from the perspective of family system theory. Bowen's family systems theory provides a road map to better understand the variations in recovery from death and loss for different family members and between different families. A family systems understanding of grief and loss broadens the lens to consider the variations in how families respond to an acute event (Brown, 2012). The family system framework also provides the concepts necessary for describing the structural changes that occur in the family following a death (Nadeau, 1998). Muxen (1991) suggested that family systems theory: "[Provides] a view of the family as a set of intimately connected people who are mutually influential on each other in some way, and whose relationships evolve time interactively with each other as well as with past, present, and anticipated future context." (p.16)

System thinking includes the view that most families exist in some type of homeostasis balance and that the death of a family member will unbalance the system and cause the family to experience discomfort of varying degrees (Wodren, 1982 in Nadeau, 1998). In my experience, my family system was shaken badly and shattered brutally after my brother's death. It seemed as if each and every person in my family was locked in separate rooms, not wanting to show each other our pain and suffering. From my perspective, everyone was trying to hold back,

either to process their own pain or to stay strong for others. We were learning to grieve alone:

learning to grieve in silence. Sometimes it seemed as if this silence was coming from a place of

love and care for each other, such as my parents who always cared for each other. I had never

seen my dad so quiet, and my mom looked so exhausted. It seemed as if my dad was holding on

to his pain because he might not want to fall apart in front of my mom. Even if our family unit

was falling apart, I did not see even a single tear falling from my father's eyes. He was standing

tall and strong. As a family, we never expressed our feelings to each other, and, to this day, I still

cannot fully understand why we were not able to cry together as a family. The fear behind

grieving visibly is almost unknown to me, but all I remember was that each of us processed our

loss in a completely different ways.

Death disrupts a family system's equilibrium, modifies the structure, and requires system

reorganization in feedback processes, role distribution, and functions (Bowen, 1976; Jackson,

1965 in Murray, Toth & Clinkinbeard, 2010). While the death of any family member is sad and

difficult for a family, the death of a family member who helped to maintain a family's

equilibrium will typically present a much more challenging recovery (Brown, 2012). My brother

was on one hand the rock of the family, our strength and on the other hand was a binding force

among all of us. He was not only a source to bridge between me and my parents but also played

the similar role for my other siblings in order to create harmonious relationships among family

members.

It seemed as if my family was in a huge transition after his death. Each of us had to

adjust to our new roles after this substantial change in our family structure. For example, my

second brother – who was two years younger than my deceased brother – was not only

bewildered because of his loss but was also terrified thinking that he needed to step up as a

strong caretaker of the family. He was confused and unsure about his new role. I took on the role

of a caretaker for my sister-in-law, who was a young widower, and for my brother's young

children. I stayed with my sister-in-law for a year and became a mother-like figure to her

children by supporting and loving them unconditionally. Sometimes I was divided between my

two families: my immediate family that needed my support and my brother's family that seemed

to be falling apart as well. I also found it very challenging to keep a balance between my

responsibility as a daughter and my role as a caregiver for my brother's family. Sometimes my

parents also shared the discomfort because they needed me as well. I carried an enormous

amount of guilt and even shame that I was unable to keep a balance between my role that I had

chosen in order to stay strongly connected to my brother's family and my responsibility as a

daughter who wanted to support her elderly parents as well.

At the same time, my family did not understand how important it was for all of us to

discuss our new roles; thus, there was always either a conflict or confusion among us. Sometimes

it seemed as if we were distant from each other and other times we would engage with each other

angrily. It felt as if there was a lot unsaid and unheard on everyone's part. It has often been noted

that adding or subtracting even a single member of a family has dramatic implications for the

structure of the family (Broderick & Smith, 1979, as cited in Nadeau, 1998). Bowen suggested

some options using a family system theory in order to manage the impact of loss of a loved one,

including: a) Visiting dying family members as often as possible; (b) Including children (children

aren't hurt by exposure to death as much as they are hurt by the anxiety of survivors); (c)

Involving as many extended family members as possible; (d) Having open caskets in order to

provide as much contact between the dead and living as possible; and, (e) Sending out prompt

obituary notices and communicating in a timely manner with relatives and friends (Brown,

2012).

After learning more about family theory and connecting this learning to my grief and loss

experience, I realize that as a family we did follow parts of the above mentioned theory which

helped to support us as a family such as going to my brother's grave regularly. Moreover, having

an open casket that is also part of our cultural as well as religious ritual in order to provide

immediate and extended family as much contact as possible was helpful in many ways. My sister

in law was also given some time in privacy with open casket with an intention that she might be

able to bring herself to a closure. The most difficult was including my brother's son who was 3

year old at that time in the funeral ceremony as well giving him a chance to say good bye to his

father was with an intention to give him appropriate exposure but words cannot capture the pain

we all went through as a family going through that process.

I also recognize that I have much more awareness and a greater understanding now as

compared to when I was dealing with the intense loss of my brother. "The sibling relationship is

unique among human relationships . . . the death of a sibling marks an end to what is expected to

be one of the longest and sometimes most intimate relationship of a lifetime" (Robinson &

Mahon, 1997, p. 477, as cited in Beder, 2005). Moving forward, I am eager to learn how I can

provide support as a helper when I am working with a family going through experiences related

to grief and loss. Throughout the autoethnographic process I feel as if I have learned a great deal

about grief and loss by analyzing my experiences and by connecting what I have gone through to

relevant literature. Ultimately, writing this document has been an eye opening experience for me.

I am currently on a journey toward becoming a professional helper, and, as I look back on the other side of the bridge, I realize that I have a much better understanding of what therapeutic approaches and techniques could have helped me and my family process our grief and loss experience more effectively. I believe that this new learning and greater understanding of what I experienced years ago can also provide me with deeper insights of how to work with a family going through similar experiences; thus, I am passionate to apply this new knowledge within my work with future clients and families who are dealing with grief and loss in their lives; however, I believe that it is very important for me to understand and connect to my experience of loss in even greater detail and depth before I take on the responsibility to help others.

I feel as if this new understanding of my lived experiences is a significant part of my journey of re-learning the world: a journey that I hope will help me grow both in my personal and professional life. Klass (1987) noted that "bereavement is complex, for it reaches to the heart of what it means to be human and what it means to have a relationship" (p. 31).

Invisible Grieving

I processed my loss by staying strong for others. I stayed strong for my parents who had lost their son who was their strength. I stayed strong for my siblings who did not know what to do. I stayed strong for my sister-in-law who was falling apart after losing her life partner and her best friend. I stayed strong for my niece – my late brother's daughter – who was born two weeks before my brother passed away: a beautiful little soul who had just entered the world and did not even know that she had lost her father figure before she was even able to call him dad. I stayed strong for my nephew, my late brother's son who was three years old and had no idea what was happening and no idea where his dad was.

From my perspective, my nephew was going through a tremendous amount of pain and he could not express this pain in a way that the adults in his life could understand. He seemed to be angry with all adults including his mother, started wetting his bed, used to cry a lot. Research suggests that bereaved children are a vulnerable population, at increased risk for social impairment and psychopathology (Baker, Sedney, & Gross, 1992; Berlinsky & Biller, 1982; Cournos, 2001; Fain-Leslie, 2002; Weller, Weller, Fristad, & Bowes, 1991 in Eppler, 2008). Various emotions such as shock, guilt, and anger envelop grieving children and their families (Silverman & Worden, 1992, 1993; Worden, 1996; Worden & Silverman, 1996 in Eppler, 2008). I realize now that I was grieving invisibly as I cared for my family members who were grieving visibly. Looking now, from the other side of the bridge, I can see that I found comfort in taking care of my loved ones, especially my brother's children.

In my experience, invisible grieving was the process of finding a quiet corner in a silent room where I could be alone, a safe place where I was able to hold myself. I needed to find a place where I would not burden others with my pain and suffering, a place where I could shed tears and not have to feel embarrassed, a place where I could learn how to be kind to myself. I would wrap my arms around my body and then allow myself to release some pain by letting myself be. I felt like this place was a personal space created by me where I could meet myself where I was at, a place where I could feel what I wanted to feel. Invisible grieving was my way to cope with a new change in my life after losing my safe haven. Invisible grieving was my way to face the fear of dealing with my pain. I did not choose to run away from or to avoid the pain. Rather, I chose to sit with my emotions and to feel their intensity. I was not aware of it at the time, but I was slowly creating a path that would ultimately lead to healing. My respect and love

for myself has increased after writing about my experience of grieving invisibly and creating a safe space for myself.

Other than creating a safe space for myself, what I found the most comforting was not only spending time but bonding with my brother's young children. Those little souls who belonged to my brother, they were part of him, pieces of his heart. I felt as staying close to them was a way to still stay connected to my brother's soul as I was still bonded to him but in a different way. According to Beder (2005), when there is an absence of an attachment figure through death, an innate motivational system is activated that compels the individual to search for the deceased and to do everything possible to regain that person's proximity and care. The idea of continuing bonds with the deceased for individual grieving has been widely discussed and explored in various fields including psychology, social work, gerontology, and, more recently, communication (Davis, 2010; Ellis, 2013; Paxton, 2013,2014; Rennels & Paxton, 2013, as cited in Paxton, 2015). Researchers have also described how continuing bonds are formed differently within families who experience the same death of a loved one (Foster et al., 2011, as cited in Paxton, 2015).

In hindsight, I recognize that staying close and deeply connected to my brother's family was providing me with a purpose in my life. It was also the first time in my life that I realized that I find a great amount of comfort in giving love and spreading kindness. It was the first time in my life that I realized that I was living with and for a purpose. It was the first time in my life that I recognized that my life had a meaning and this whole process seemed to be what I would call a meaning making process. I would also like to elaborate and expand on what meaning making means to me in relation to grief and loss.

Grief and Loss: Meaning Making Process

Searching for meaning after one has experienced a significant loss appears to be an almost universal phenomenon and is an important part of the grieving process (Davis, 2001; Miles & Crandall, 1983; Parkes & Weiss, 1983; Wheeler, 2001, as cited in Winokuer & Harris, 2012). In order to elaborate on the meaning making process, I believe it is necessary to briefly introduce the terms 'meaning making' and 'meaning finding'. According to Howard, Winkouer, Darcy, and Harris (2012), meaning-making refers to the conscious and active process of reinterpreting and bringing new meanings to one's experiences, actions, and sufferings, while meaning finding refers to one's personal awareness and accepting the meaning that arises from grief and suffering. These two processes mix together as one rebuilds their assumptive world after a significant loss.

From my experience with grief and loss, I learned that the journey between meaning making and meaning finding can be an excruciatingly intense process: a process that can spark an individual to begin a lifelong journey of finding purpose in life. Some refer to this process as spiritual awakening or enlightenment and emergence; Zen Buddhism refers to this process as searching for wisdom and insight (Adler, 2005). Howard et al. (2012) suggested that many bereaved individuals have an opportunity to re-examine their beliefs and to deepen their faith after a loss. Fowler (1981) called this process of searching for meaning 'transformed faith consciousness', which allows greater understanding of purpose in one's life. According to Murray, Toth, and Clininbeard (2010), grief can be viewed as a process of meaning construction that evolves throughout the life of the bereaved.

Throughout my meaning making process, I am a Lego house that has been knocked down after losing a loved one -- a Lego house that I have been building my whole life. The pieces of this Lego House represent one's shattered dreams or pieces of their broken heart after experiencing grief and loss. In such painful times, their loved ones and their community, as well as professional helpers, may help support the individual by helping them to pick up the pieces and to rebuild strength in order to build a new Lego House. This new Lego House has the potential to have a completely new shape; thus, bringing new purpose to the individuals' life.

I chose to share this experience with you, my readers, because I wish for you to pay close attention to what you can learn from the experience of being knocked down by painful grief and loss life experiences to the journey of healing and re-building a new lego house. I wish for you to learn that the road towards healing can be in giving, in sharing, and in being kind to what is left behind. I wish for you to learn how shattered pieces of the same knocked down lego house can be put together in the journey of re-building a new lego house. This is what I have learned from my lived experience. In my understanding, the acceptance that what I have lost will never come back after going through an intense experience of grief and loss also comes with excruciating pain. At the same time, by keeping one's heart open to what is still there, this realization can be a path to healing and finding true meaning in life. According to Neimeyer, Prigerson, and Davies (2002), meaning reconstruction in the wake of loss entails not only sadness, sorrow, and despair, but also the potential for growth. And, even in the most painful losses, many survivors experience the enhancement of personal meaning rather than its decimation. I am happy to say that I was a survivor who gained meaning.

Grief and Loss: Personal Journey of Re-learning the World

In this moment, I realize that my journey of looking back on the other side of the bridge at my lived experiences is coming to an end. However, rather than calling this journey an ending, I have decided to call it a new beginning. And, I have called this new beginning my personal journey of re-learning the world. Writing this autoethnography has provided me with deep insights regarding one of the most intense experiences of loss that has happened to me. This experience changed my entire life. While writing this document, I have been looking at the same experience through a different lens: a much broader and deeper lens. I have recognized and acknowledged my family's resilience and strength. And, by doing so, I have recognized and acknowledged my wholeheartedness and genuine kindness. These traits describe who I am today: a person who wishes to pass on the message of love and hope to the world around me. Overall, this whole process has played a key role in providing me with support, which, in turn, has helped me strengthen my relationship with myself. This process has also helped me to understand my work as future therapist in a deeper, more meaningful way.

As a future therapist, I believe it is essential to provide my clients who are grieving with a container: a safe space in which they can process change. Within this container, I will strive to help each of these client's create a web of supportive relationships and a sense of community that can encourage them to evolve and emerge from their suffering and move towards healing. I recognize the importance of providing a container to grievers where I can help them hold their pain. Acccording to Moules, Simonson, Fleiszer, Prins & Glasgow (2007) the work of psychotherapy individually, in couples, families, and groups, seems to be about creating a space and place where what the bereaved are running from is allowed to meet them. They are allowed

to embrace, reverence, suffer, sorrow, and celebrate their grief. The core of psychotherapeutic work with the bereaved can be spiritual in nature because the core of grief is a spiritual experience. It is an experience of making meaning, doubting meaning, or questioning the purpose of lives lived, living, and lost. Clinicians also acknowledged that grief is a complicated, complex, and tangled experience (Moules, Simonson, Fleiszer, Prins & Glasgow, 2007). I will also provide a more detailed overview of working with grief and loss in upcoming chapters.

Being a future therapist and learning more about how to work with clients dealing with grief and loss, I recognize the importance of being aware of my theory of finding meaning in every experience of loss. I also realize that meeting clients where they are at in terms of their personal experience of loss will be an essence of my therapeutic work. At the same time keeping in mind that introducing a meaning making process or finding potential for personal growth underneath grief and loss can be triggering if one is not ready to go through this multilayered process. For this process can be agonizing and painful at first, but, in my experience, can help one to find a path towards healing. According to Siegel (2010), being mindful as therapists, we remain open to whatever arise enabling us to take the next step in therapy, together and alongside our clients. In order to support those I will be working with, I need to understand their process of finding meaning in their life and help them define and share their stories. In my experience, all of these factors can help a griever move through the process of grief and loss and can ultimately help them to find what meaning they want to give to their lives.

"Grief can be the garden of compassion. If you keep your heart open through everything, your pain can become your greatest ally in your life's search for love and wisdom" (Rumi, 2015).

CHAPTER FOUR

In the past three chapters, I have shared with you, my readers, a significant experience of grief and loss that I have looked back upon from the other side of the bridge. I have also shared with you what life has offered me through that experience of loss, as well as what was taken away from me. In this chapter, I will present my story from a different perspective. Utilizing a theoretical framework and intensive research conducted on grief and loss is the next step towards having my story heard by a broader audience. I will describe a theoretical framework and elaborate on the experience of where I see myself within this framework in relation to my experience of loss.

The previous chapters of this document served as a reflection of my process going through the experiences of loss, as well as the effects of living with the pain of losing a loved one. The next step is for me to share what has helped me to move forward in life; thus, I will be looking ahead at the other side of the bridge. I must admit that having an in depth insight into my lived experiences and articulating those experiences within a theoretical framework was not an easy procedure to grasp at first. The process of writing this document up until this moment has taken a lot of energy out of my mind and body. After finishing the first three chapters of this document, I strongly desired to stop and let myself breathe. In those moments, I looked around at my surroundings and observed the life that was occurring around me in the present moment.

The purpose to be in the present moment was to make an attempt to move forward: not only to finish this academic document, but to move forward with life. At the same time, I am sharing a story that anyone and everyone could relate to and to support those who needed help to move forward with their lives. I would like to share with you, my readers, how I transitioned

from not being able to find the energy to finish this document to where I am right now: determined, dedicated, and stronger and more passionate to share the rest of my story. I am also sharing this part with you since it enhances the value of research that I will be referring to. I have explored and discovered this value as I processed and moved through my painful experiences of loss.

Here I am also going to elaborate on my experience of finding research related to my lived experiences that provided me with an authentic source and a point of connection. I have mainly used scholarly articles, but I have also read books and have watched video clips on grief and loss. I have integrated scholarly research with my personal experiences in past papers; however, this autoethnography is the first document that I have put my entire heart and soul in to. This document is a piece of me. It is an opportunity to write and to read out loud one of the most intense experiences of grief and loss that has occurred in my life. Looking back on the other side of the bridge, I have realized how this experience of loss has defined my life; however, looking ahead at the same bridge has helped me to understand how my life can be shaped because of this experience. The process of finding a connection with literature has provided me with clarity and a sense of belonging.

I mentioned clarity because, all of a sudden, some of my behaviours – as well as my family members' reactions towards our loss – started to make sense. I was never able to understand the after effects of our loss before this point in time. I was also alone in those moments, confused and bewildered and not able to contain my pain. With the help of this literature, I could normalize my experience and could make sense of what me and my family have been through.

I also mentioned what I call 'a sense of belonging' with the literature. While I was understanding the concept behind a theoretical framework, I felt as if literature has articulated parts of my life in a more subtle way. I could not only look at my experience from many different perspectives but I could also strongly connect to those perspectives. I was finding literature to support the content of my story, but, during this process, I discovered that literature was also helping me situate my lived experience within a certain framework, which ultimately gave me a strong sense of belonging.

Next, I will describe a theoretical framework that resonated with me and will relate this framework to my lived experience. I will also elaborate on the concepts of clarity and sense of belonging and connect these concepts to my experience of grief and loss.

The Two Track Model of Bereavement

Background

The Two Track Model of Bereavement was developed in the early 1980s to integrate theoretical, clinical, and empirical literatures on the response to loss and bereavement over time(Rubin, 1981, 1984, 1992 in Rubin, Nadav, Malkinson, Koren, Shnarch, & Michaeli, 2009). For much of the 20th century, the predominant working hypothesis regarded the response to bereavement as a time-limited phenomenon designed to sever the relational tie to the deceased (Rubin, Malkinson, & Witztum, 2000). This model considers the behavioral-psychological functioning of an individual after a loss, as well as the internalized relationship to the deceased (Harris &Winokuer, 2012). In this model, the loss process is conceptualized along two distinct but interactive axes that attend to these overt and covert aspects of the response to loss (Rubin, Malkinson & Witztum, 2003). This model is called a two track model because it addresses grief

from a multidimensional lens, exploring both a) the bereaved individual's ability to function and

navigate the world after a significant loss (Track I) and b) the tendency of bereaved individual to

continue in an ongoing meaningful, but intangible, relationship with a deceased individual over

long periods (Track II) (Rubin, Malkinson & Witzum, 2000 in Harris &Winokuer, 2012).

In other words, Track I is concerned with biopsychosocial functioning in the wake of loss

whereas Track II focuses on the bereaved person's ongoing emotional attachment and

relationship to the deceased (Rubin, 1999). This perspective assumes that assessment of the

relationship to the deceased is a central axis for understanding the bereavement response over

time (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996, as cited in Rubin 1999). The formulation of ''broken''

bonds with the deceased during the grief and mourning period has been replaced by the

conceptualization that bonds are transformed during the bereavement process, and that these

bonds with highly significant others typically continue for as long as the bereaved might live

(Klass et al., 1996; Stroebe, Stroebe, & Hansson, 1993, as cited in Rubin. et al, 2009).

According to Rubin (1999), writers, clergy, physicians, and scientists find it difficult to

conceptualize the lifelong effects of some losses. Similarly, confusion of symptomatic responses,

coping behaviours, and long-term influences of loss further complicate the picture. The two track

model provides a basic framework that relates to theory, research, and clinical work (Rubin,

1999). Rubin (1999) strongly urged clinicians working with bereaved individuals to identify

which "track" appears to be more problematic or prominent and to focus on that aspect of the

grief in the support that is offered (Harris & Winokuer, 2012). In accord with the psychodynamic

and interpersonal approaches to loss, this framework considered the effects of loss through the

prism of a weakening or change in the tie to the deceased (Rubin, 1999).

Rubin (1981) concluded that two main approaches have influenced and often underlie the

bulk of the research and clinical literature associated with the field of loss (Rubin, 1999).The

first approach in accord with the psychodynamic and interpersonal approaches to loss

considered separation from the deceased as the heart of the response to loss (Freud, 1917 in

Rubin, 1999). In this approach, the grief is considered to be reflected in somatic or psychiatric

symptoms, in emotional, interpersonal, or cognitive difficulties, but in any event, the precipitant

and maintaining cause was in the difficulty in ''separation'' from the deceased (Stroebe,

Gergen, M. M., Gergen, K. J., & Stroebe, 1992; Volkan, 1981, as cited in Rubin, 1999).

The second major approach was drawn from a more empirically oriented perspective. The

researchers and clinicians associated with this approach were unconcerned with the significance

of the bond to the deceased and its meaning for recovery from loss and rather focused on

measuring the various components of day-to-day functioning prior to and following the loss.

This measurement made it possible to estimate the extent to which the bereaved person were to

continue to suffer the aftereffects of their loss in their various life activities (Kolk, McFarlane, &

Weisaeth, 1996).

Although each approach to the field of loss had merit and value, there was a basic need to

combine the two. As a result, in a series of theoretical and research articles, a bifocal approach to

bereavement was advocated (Rubin, 1981, 1982, 1984a, 1984b, 1985, as cited in Rubin, 1999).

Therefore, it was only logical to consider bereavement from both perspectives. The name given

to this approach was the Two-Track Model of Bereavement, and this approach considered both

the bereaved person's functioning and the quality and nature of their continuing attachment to the

deceased (Rubin,1999). The importance of adopting a bifocal approach that is present in the

Two-Track Model of Bereavement is that it tracks both functioning and the status of the

relationship to the deceased (Rubin, Malkinson, & Witztum, 2003).

Interventions

Assessment of the response to loss and bereavement has become increasingly important

to clinicians, theoreticians, and researchers (Neimeyer & Hogan, 2001; Neimeyer, Hogan, &

Laurie, 2008 in Rubin, et al, 2009). On the basis of theoretical and research literature associated

with TTMoB, a two track bereaved questionnaire (TTBQ) was formulated.

Two-Track Model of Bereavement Questionnaire

A self-report questionnaire was constructed in accordance with the Two- Track Model of

Bereavement. The Two-Track Model of Bereavement Questionnaire (TTBQ) was designed to

assess response to loss over time. The TTBQ in its full form is a 70-item self-report

questionnaire. An initial set of questions was developed over a period of one year by two of the

authors, Rubin and Malkinson. The initial questionnaire was then administered to several groups

of bereaved individuals whose comments were used to determine the clarity of the questionnaire,

as well as to help determine other items that the authors thought could be added and items they

thought should be changed or dropped. The questionnaire was revised accordingly, and was then

administered to other bereaved individuals – as well as to mental health professionals in training,

for additional pre-testing. This feedback was incorporated into revisions of the questionnaire.

This process was repeated three times to ensure that the measure would be satisfactory.

The Hebrew version was translated into English and back-translated into Hebrew to ensure

comparability of the versions (Boelen, van den Bout, de Keijser, & Hoijtink, 2003 in Rubin, Bar

Nadav, Malkinson, Koren, Goffer-Shnarch & Michaeli, 2009). The final version of the

questionnaire contained 70 items. Some of these items tapped into biopsychosocial functioning, pre-loss relationship to the deceased, and the nature of the current grief and the mourning process, while others were designed to allow respondents to indicate their wish for help and their subjective view of their current condition.

Track I focuses on the bereaved person's biopsychosocial functioning and Track II concerns the bereaved's ongoing relationship to the range of memories, images, thoughts, and feeling states associated with the deceased (Rubin, Nadav, Malkinson, Koren, Goffer-Shnarch & Michaeli, 2009). An overview of the two main domains addressed in the TTBQ questionnaire is included below in Table 1. Track I, the range of aspects of the individual's functioning across affective, interpersonal, somatic, and classical psychiatric indicators is considered. Each of the 10 features depicted is noted for its importance in the literature and in people's response to bereavement. Track II, the relationship to the deceased, is broken down into 10 subareas that capture the salient features of the interpersonal relationship to the deceased (Rubin, 1999).

Table 1

The Two Track Model of Bereavement: A multidimensional View (Rubin, 1999)

Track 1- General of Biopsychosocial Functioning	Track II- Ongoing relationship with the deceased
• Anxiety • Depressive effects and cognitions • Somatic and health Concerns • Behaviours and Symptoms associated with psychiatric problems • Post-truamtic Indicators • Familial relationships • Other interpersonal relationships • Self-esteem and Self-worth • Overall meaning structure in life • Investment in life tasks	• Narrative construction of the relationship • Emotional closeness and distance from the deceased • Positive effects vis-a`-vis( in relation to) the deceased • Negative effects vis-a`-vis the deceased • Preoccupation with the loss and the lost • Idealization • Indication of conflict and problems with the deceased

Before I elaborate on each aspect of this model, I am going to pause and elaborate on my own grief and loss experience in relation to the Two Track Model of Bereavement.

Table 2

The Two-Track Model of Bereavement: A personal overview

Track 1- General of Biopsychosocial Functioning	Track II- Ongoing relationship with the deceased
- Anxiety - Isolation: Avoiding family members, friends, and other members of my community - Not taking part in regular activities because of lack of interest - Lack of sleep - Post Traumatic Indicators: Flashbacks: specifically from the day of my brother's funeral. My mom's pain, my sister in law's wailing about her loss, my nephew's confused and bewildered face, and my brother's casket were the most significant part of my flashbacks. - Familial and other interpersonal relationships: I distanced myself from my family to hide my pain and broke up with my fiancé at that time since I was not able to manage a new relationship. - Low self-esteem and self-worth - Academic downfall: I failed an exam and had poor grades while finishing my Masters. Lack of interest in pursuing my career goals.	- A story that was incomplete and unheard. Words that came out of my soul and dissolved in the air, and not knowing what to say. - I found myself closer to my brother than when he was alive, repeated unsaid words to acknowledge that he was the rock of the family. - My ability to provide support to my brother's widow and his kids seemed to strengthen my relationship with him. - I distanced myself from my parents and siblings, and moved with my sister in law away from my immediate family to find inner peace - I couldn't think about anything or anyone else but the loss. I wondered how me and my family could ever heal and move on with life - Various elements of the loss process: (Searching for answers – the reasons behind mines and my family's loss – shock, disbelief, disorganization, and effort to reorganize life) - Tried to preserve good times spent and memories with my deceased brother, an effort to understand what it means to keep someone always alive in our hearts.

In Table 2, I have incorporated my personal experience and have shed light on some of the symptoms introduced by the two-track model of bereavement. These symptoms are a

reflection of my lived experience and will provide me with an opportunity to share with you, my readers, where I see myself in this theoretical framework of grief and loss. Some readers may be able to relate to not only my experience but also to this theoretical framework in general.

Even though the loss of my brother was years ago, by making sense of what I was feeling at the time, I was offered some clarity. I find value in normalizing and understanding my reactions in relation to my experience of loss. "You were not losing your mind. You were not insane. You were not burdening your family by acting out, Hufsa: you were grieving", a voice whispered in my ears. I can see myself while passing on this message to my family and friends who have gone through similar experiences, the clients I work with while working with grief and loss, and, with you, my readers who are sharing this healing journey with me.

Table 2 is my personal version of the two-track model with my lived experiences; however, it is also a visual presentation of how experiences of grief can look like in one's life: At the same time, Track II draws attention to the process that may help an individual move through their pain and suffering in their own time and to show them a way to a never ending journey of healing. This journey can take place in many different ways for every individual. For me, even if I was convinced that I would never be able to heal or that nothing could help me and my family keep ourselves together after our loss, I was able to connect with my brother's family as a way to re-define my relationship with him. I feel as if this connection has motivated me to take a closer look at grief processes and to elaborate on the therapeutic and practical implication of the two track model of bereavement.

Therapeutic Implication

According to Rubin, Bar Nadav, Malkinson, Koren, Goffer-Shnarch & Michaeli, (2009), The TTBQ offers a clinically relevant and methodologically sound approach to assessment

which will further the measurement and understanding of the process of living after significant

interpersonal loss. According to Rubin, Malkinson, & Witztum (2003), in the language of the

Two-Track Model of Bereavement, the main feature of the intervention is focused on the

relationship to the deceased, and the authors believed that this was the key to securing the return

to functioning that was affected by loss. Rubin et al. (2003) suggested that in few cases,

intervening solely along Track I was ineffective. In fact, only when interventions revolving

around the relationship to the deceased were instituted did the treatment make significant

headway into client's difficulties. In other words therapists incorporating a Two-Track Model of

Bereavement into their practice focus on the relationship and stress the bereavement involved

from a relational perspective. Therapists are then able to redirect their client's to function more

effectively because of the reworking of their relationship to the deceased (Rubin, Malkinson, &

Witztum, 2003).

Next, I would like to share with you, my readers, the notion of reworking the relationship

with the deceased in the context of my individual and my family's experience of loss. It is

important to note that the visual presentation of this model that I have shared with you might be

somewhat different for each member of my family after the loss of my brother. The symptoms

under each domain (Track I and II), as well as the complexity and intensity of those symptoms,

could be entirely different for my parents, my four siblings, my sister in law, and even for my

nieces and nephews: they each lost the same person, yet they each have a different lived

experience. When I am looking on the other side of the bridge, I can see each and every member

of my family locked in a separate room, trying to hide their pain from each other. There was no

eye contact: everyone was distant and lost. I can imagine that every member of my family had a long list of Track I and Track II symptoms.

If I could change anything while I am looking on the other side of the bridge, I would imagine my family coming together. I see us carrying something like a plain piece of paper. I see all of us writing and sharing how we were functioning in our day to day life (Biopsychosocial functioning, Track I). I see us explaining what our barriers were, how difficult and painful life was without our rock and soul of the family. Yet, I realize that we all were obliged to function so we did. My sister completed her final exam, I got married, my younger brother had a baby boy, and my sister in law was accepted in a medical school: we all did what we had to do.

I am also quite confident to say that we all continued having an ongoing relationship with our brother in different ways. We all knew that he was, and will always be, part of our lives, and that he will always be alive in our hearts. If I could change anything while I am looking on the other side of the bridge, I would like to share how we all could develop a new relationship (ongoing relationship with the deceased, Track II) with our loss. We could develop a strong connection and could bond as a family by sharing how each and every one of us could keep him alive in our hearts and our lives. What was keeping us alive could be the newly developed relationship, but, to this day, this continues to be an unknown mystery for me. For me, the missing piece was not being able to come together, to share, to bond, and to find a connection through our vulnerabilities. I believe that we needed to not only show our pain but that we needed to share our healing journey individually to each other as a family.

My intention behind sharing my personal experience is the passion I have to spread a message of hope to others. Behind this message, the purpose is my understanding that each and

every one of us has gone through a number of experiences of loss once or many times in our

lives. And, the ones who have not gone through such experiences may go through the experience

of loss in their lives at some point. Every single day, someone somewhere loses a loved one and

families grieve in silence or in isolation, sometimes not knowing what to do. My passion is to

pass on a message of hope to those families. I would like for all of those grievers to come

together and to share their process and heal as a group: as a tribe rather than suffering alone.

And, as a helping professional, finding a point of connection through grief and loss –

collectively, as a group – is my understanding of the therapeutic implication of the Two-Track

Model of Bereavement.

CHAPTER FIVE

As I begin to write the final chapter of this document, I feel as if I am ending a journey: A journey that started roughly one year ago with an idea, a concept, and – most importantly – a dream. My dream was that – from writing this autoethnography and looking back on glimpses and memories from my past – I would be able to stay connected to my inner self, as well as to my present; thus, altogether, a story I named as "Potential for Personal Growth in Grief and Loss: A Personal Journey of Re-learning the World" came to life. In the beginning stages of the writing process, all of the ideas, concepts, and dreams I had were blurry and unclear; however, as I started writing, my passion and drive to share my story helped me achieve a sense of clarity. And, as the writing process continued, parts of my story that used to not make sense were starting to make sense to me. Reaching the end of this journey feels like the warmth of sunshine after a foggy morning. I feel as if I am finally able to put the pieces of my puzzle together. By writing this autoethnography, I was able to resolve and untangle some of the mysteries and complexities associated with grief and loss experiences that have happened in my past by looking back on the other side of the bridge. And, at the same time, the future seems to be as clear as sunshine when I look ahead on the other side of the bridge.

Now that I am reaching the end of this journey, I have divided this final chapter into three main parts. First I will share with you, my readers, the true essence of this document: the potential for personal growth after experiencing a loss. Secondly, I will provide a direct connection between the two-track model of bereavement and counselling. I will also describe a number of interventions that counsellors can utilize while working with people who have experienced loss. I will also highlight the importance of bringing theory into practice. Lastly, I

will finish this document by sharing with you, my readers, what I view as the overall significance

of my thesis as a whole. I will outline why the concepts outlined in this thesis matter to me, as

well as to other counselling professionals and to the general public – especially individuals who

have experienced grief and loss themselves.

Before I begin providing you, my readers, with a brief overview of my understanding of

the potential for personal growth after experiencing grief and loss, I would first like to elaborate

on an idea that is embedded in a meaning construction perspective in relation to grief and loss. In

my understanding meaning making process is strongly connected to finding potential for

personal growth in relation to grief and loss thus I will introduce and elaborate on this

perspective here.

Grief and Loss from a Meaning Reconstruction Perspective

Recent research on meaning reconstruction in the wake of loss has suggested that the

effort to "make meaning" of the loss in practical, personal, existential, or spiritual terms may be

one of the most significant factors that interacts with ongoing attachment to predict post-loss

adjustment (Neimeyer, 2001 in Neimeyer, Baldwin, Gillies, 2006). According to Calhoun and

Tedeschi (2006), positive integration of the loss can bring about a progressive reconstruction of

one's self-narrative associated with life-transforming "post traumatic growth" (Neimeyer,

Baldwin, Gillies, 2006). Neimeyer's (2006) study shows that high levels of meaning making

consistently predicted better grief outcomes during the first two years of bereavement. In

addition, according to Attig (1996), as one grieves, they give meaning to their experiences and

actions, and especially to their suffering.

A number of researchers highlight the potential for personal growth after grief and loss experiences. Some have identified this process as 'meaning making' (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006) while others have named the process 'meaning finding' (Holland, Currier & Neimeyer , 2006) or 'post traumatic growth' (Rubin, Malkinson & Witztum, 2003). I feel as if I have discussed each of these underlying messages in previous chapters as I described my experience of grief and loss. This autoethnography has provided me with a platform – a source, a way to put my story out there – not only as a wounded soul, but as a healer as well. This healing process is linked to what I call my personal journey of re-learning the world. According to Attig (1996), grieving as relearning the world consists of "an intimate combination of parts or elements not easy to unravel or separate" (p. 33). Relearning the world is a process that is "involved, intricate, confused, complex, compound, the opposite of simple" (Attig, 1996, p. 33). And, ultimately, the interplay of meaning making and meaning finding permeates the diverse process of relearning the world (Attig, 1996).

While I have been focused on outlining the meaning making process and highlighting the potential for personal growth, I would like to take this opportunity to draw my reader's attention to a slightly different perspective. I believe it is important to include a different perspective, because it will allow me to be more aware and sensitive as I look at the main essence of this document. It is important to note that a common theme in this meaning making process in the aftermath of loss is that significant loss disrupts the coherence of one's matrix of personal meanings by which individuals order their life experiences. Thus, these individuals will often call for active attempts to make sense of the loss, to find some sort of "silver lining" or benefit in their experience, and to reorganize their identity as a survivor (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006). An

unsuccessful struggle to make sense of the death of a loved one predicts heightened distress, particularly in the early months of bereavement (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998). Indeed, sense-making in particular moderated the effect of continuing attachment on grief, suggesting that it is those bereaved persons who remain closely bonded to their loved ones, but who are unable to integrate the loss into a more ample system of personal meaning, that are at the greatest risk for bereavement complications (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006).

Keeping above mentioned perspective in mind in relation to counselling, I would like to mention that I am an individual who is on an ongoing journey of healing. I am also a helping professional and a healer for others who have experienced losses. Thus, I believe it is incredibly important for me to meet my clients where they are at, and to continually be aware of where I am at too. I feel as if it is important for me to elaborate on this concept of meeting clients where they are at because I can cause more harm than help if I am not able to.

First of all, I recognize that while I am building a connection, a healing relationship, and a therapeutic alliance with my clients, it is important that I am able to identify how much they are able to receive in that relationship. Secondly, my personal experience might be a good example to understand what this offering and receiving means during this process of helping others. In my experience, I was not able to identify my personal strength or even receive support in difficult times. At the same time, I was also able to realize that there was a lot that I had gained by being there for my family. I have been in a stage in life where the idea of potential for personal growth after an intense experience like grief and loss seemed daunting. In those moments I could be offended, hurt, or bewildered with the idea of personal growth from an experience that has shattered me and my loved ones.

During that time of my life, I remember thinking to myself that I could not feel my feet on the ground. I remember feeling as if there was nothing but brick walls around me, and those brick walls were haunting and taking up all the space. I felt isolated in those times. I felt as if I would never be able to release myself from that pain, so I suffered. I suffered in silence and this is what I have called invisible grieving in previous chapters. However, during that stage, I could also look inside myself in order to attain an in depth understanding of the fact that underneath my pain and suffering, somewhere deep inside me, many parts of myself had shifted: Deep within my soul, many parts of me had moved.

Today, I ask myself this question, "Was I able to face that new me, that invisible me that was evolving inside"? Then a voice comes from within saying, *"No, you were not ready. It was so soon. How could you? No, you were just not ready".* If I imagine myself in that stage, trying to face what was evolving inside me, I almost want to put both of my hands on my face and say to myself: *"Please do not try to say or show me that my pain and suffering has any kind of potential."* As Lewis (1976) said, "No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear," (Lewis, 1976, p. 1, as cited in Attig, 1996). I was suffering and I wanted someone to just be there with me. I wanted someone to be there to let me process and breathe through that pain. On the other side of the bridge, I still remember that self: that scared and terrified side of me while I was going through all those years of my life. I have shared with you, my readers, the process I went through within all of those developmental stages, an overview of my life. According to Attig (1996), "when those we love die, we embark on a difficult journey of the heart" (p. 35).

Today I am able to look back on my experiences of grief and loss. I can re-visit, talk, and write about everything I have been through. Now, I have realized that I am in a part of my life

where I am able to look back as well as look ahead. Today I am able to see that person within me

that has evolved after that suffering. I can see the person I am right now: the person who has

become a helper, a healer, and a passionate giver. I can see that I am kind and generous and am

ready to spread the message of love, hope, and kindness to the world around me. Attig (1996)

stated that there is a difference between 'being in pain' and 'having a pain' of losing a loved one.

Attig (1996) also suggested that experiencing these kinds of pain is somewhat similar to what he

has called "spiritual pain." In other words, 'having a pain' is when one is processing their

suffering and through that suffering, many individuals are able to connect to their inner self,

whereas 'being in pain' is when one is overwhelmed by that suffering and is not able to connect

to their inner self.

I believe that when I connect my experience to the counselling field I am meeting my

clients where they are at. This approach of meeting clients where they are at is referred to as

'relational depth' by some researchers. Relational depth is a real and distinctive occurrence

within the therapeutic encounter, and is primarily associated with the person-centered

orientation. Meeting clients where they are at is characterized by high levels of empathy,

acceptance, and genuineness towards clients, as well as feelings of aliveness, receptivity,

satisfaction, and immersion. Cooper (2005) proposed that relational depth can also be

conceptualized as a form of 'co-presence' or a 'co-experience' in a therapeutic relationship.

Thus, building on the person-centered orientation described above, I believe it is important that I

strive to be with my clients until they can see what has shifted within, who they have become,

and what their loss has offered them, rather than purely introducing or selling my clients the idea

of personal growth in the beginning of therapy. Ultimately, I believe it can be somewhat damaging to offer someone hope when they are not ready to carry that hope.

During my Master's program, one of my beloved professors, Avraham Cohen, introduced the idea of carrying hope for a client, He had said: "I can carry this hope for you until you are ready to carry it for yourself" (Avraham Cohen, personal communication, Nov 17, 2016). I would like to incorporate this idea as a helper who can carry hope for my clients and pass it on when they are ready to receive and carry it for themselves. I want to be a first-hand witness of their suffering and then their healing. I also want to help my clients to see on both sides of the bridge in their personal lives, and, within that journey, I want to meet them where they are at: which I have come to realize is my philosophy of counselling.

As I have described above, I believe my philosophy of counselling – in which I aim to meet clients where they are at – will help me support my client's as they go through their process of grieving as well as healing. I would also like to explore and expand my philosophy as I grow on a personal and professional level in order to help those I will be working with move through difficult times in their lives. According to Attig (1996),

> We are not alone when we relearn the world of our experience. Interactions with others profoundly affect our individual learning. And, together with others, we reshape and redirect our family and community life patterns and life histories. That is, we grieve not only as individuals but also as families and communities (p. 44).

> In addition, according to Attig (2000), the walk in grief is long. Different life settings arouse different responses and challenging surprise abound. A person will never go back to the beginning, they progress: seeking and finding ways of making a transition to lasting love.

Grief and Loss and Therapeutic Interventions

In the next section, I aim to link making progress and transitioning into lasting love to the process of moving forward in life from the perspective of a helping professional. I will share with you, my readers, some of the interventions and strategies that I may use with my clients while I am working with grief and loss. In the previous chapter, I have provided you with an overview of my theoretical framework: the two-track model of bereavement. In this chapter, I will focus on practical and theoretical implications of this theoretical framework, while highlighting a number of interventions and strategies that can provide guidance to helping professionals while working clients who have experienced grief and loss.

According to Malkinson, Rubin, and Witztum (2006), psychological intervention with the bereaved can provide critical assistance to individuals, families, and communities contending with the loss of significant others. Researchers and clinicians aim to determine who can benefit and for whom interventions can be life-affirming or lifesaving (Jordan & Neimeyer, 2003). For the scope of this document, I will primarily focus on the two-track model of bereavement. As I mentioned in the last chapter, in the organizational paradigm of the two-track model of bereavement, the outcome of both successful and problematic mourning are manifested along two distinct but interrelated tracks (Rubin, 1981, 1999).

According to Malkinson et al. (2006), the first domain or track of the bereavement response encompasses a range of difficulties and competencies in functioning in response to and following loss. The second track of the model addresses the unique emotional bond and an ongoing relationship with the deceased. Individuals enter therapy following loss because of discomfort and difficulty. Their difficulties may be manifest in one or both of the domains

outlined above in the Two-Track Model of Bereavement (Malkinson et al., 2006). Before

elaborating on the contribution of the two-track model in the therapeutic and clinical world, it is

very important to recognize that for some clients the focus on functioning is predominant (Track

I), whereas, in other cases, the relationship with the deceased could be the prominent component

of the therapy (Rubin, 1999). Intervention and formulation are often intertwined, and the manner

in which therapists practice psychotherapy has implications for the manner in which they

conceptualize and plan their interventions (Malkinson, Rubin & Witztum, 2006).

Track I: Iterventions and Treatment

A therapist may choose to plan an intervention focused on restoring the bereaved to

coping adequately, or better, with the demands of living following loss; such a course includes

biopsychosocial features (Track I) (Malkinson, Rubin & Witztum, 2006). Neimeyer (2001) stated

that most clients show signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression after a loss, including

difficulty sleeping, lack of appetite, limited social activities, and isolation. Of the features

associated with meaning structures, some clients question God and could be angry at him for

what he has done by making them lose their loved one. According to Malkinson et al. (2006),

before moving on to assessing Track II, clients need to be supported to help them regulate and

function in their day to day life. Any number of psychological, medical, and community-based

interventions may help with such a focus, which is aimed at improving the life functioning of the

bereaved. In addition, focusing on a client's emotional state, the use of medication if needed, and

a discussion of their difficulties with the help of psychotherapy can allow clinicians to examine

clients functioning and to support them through their acute period, which is somewhat similar to

the state of dysphoria and dysfunction (Rubin, 1999).

In the initial phase, two main issues are central: establishing a good rapport with clients and creating a safe haven. Restoring even partial functioning, as well as helping clients make a self-care plan and attend to their health, is assumed to have strengthening potential. Use of cognitive interventions included thought stopping, thought restructuring, and breathing exercises, as well as a client's choice of physical activity, are some of the useful interventions associated with this model. Clients also need to be encouraged to stay involved in their relationships with family, friends, and community to stay emotionally and behaviourally connected to life. (Malkinson, Rubin & Witztum, 2006).

Track II: Interventions and Treatment

Counsellors need to assess and address elements of their client's functioning, as well as their relationship with the deceased before deciding what to focus on during the initial phase of treatment. Malkinson et al. (2006) also suggested that the intervention utilized by the counsellor depends on the narrative told by the bereaved, for sometimes talking about the deceased can be overwhelming for the clients. However, other times, the client may be able to channel their energy to be more accessible discussion matter in therapy sessions. Malkinson et al. (2006) highlighted the fact that as therapy commences, there is usually a focus on Track I components; however, as therapy progresses, the client's relationship to the deceased (Track II) becomes the focus of the sessions (Malkinson et al.2006).

Additionally, some losses may be considered traumatic, depending on a variety of variables concerning the circumstances of the loss (whether the loss happened under ''terrible circumstances both seen and not seen'' (Rubin et al. 2003, p. 668), as well as the symptoms of trauma experienced following the loss. Importantly, from the continuing bonds perspective, the

function of bereavement is to reconstruct inner relationships with the deceased and to search for

a new meaning to life without the deceased (Klass et al. 1996; Rubin 1999 in Malkinson &

Brask-Rustad, 2013).

   I briefly mentioned the concept of traumatic bereavement above. In this document, I

have shared with you, my readers, the loss of my brother. Since my brother was a soldier on duty

in a political war, he died in the most tragic and traumatic way; thus, the traumatic nature of his

death made recovery a lot more complicated and more difficult for me and the rest of my family.

According to Robinson and Mahon (1997, p. 477, as cited in Beder, 2005), "the sibling

relationship is unique among human relationships . . . the death of a sibling marks an end to what

is expected to be one of the longest and sometimes most intimate relationship of a lifetime."

   In traumatic bereavement, an integrated view of loss and trauma provides an additional

lens from which to assess complications in the process and outcome, which ultimately impacts

the therapist's approach to intervention (Malkinson 2007; Rubin et al. 2012 in Malkinson &

Brask-Rustad (2013). Emotional disturbances in the aftermath of a traumatic loss may involve

distressing emotions including anger, anxiety, shame, guilt, and depression. These emotions may

in turn influence cognitions and appraisals in a reciprocal fashion and result in more conflict-

ridden interactions with others causing more interpersonal conflicts (Malkinson & Brask-Rustad,

2013).

   Next, I will describe how the two-track model of bereavement can be incorporated with

other therapeutic approaches. The two-track model of bereavement is a flexible model that can

be used by clinicians and linked with multiple theoretical perspectives that are focused on how

the bereaved maintains more of a relational perspective specific to the deceased (Track II)

(Malkinson et al. 2006). Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (CBT-REBT) is one of the most commonly used therapeutic approaches that counsellors utilize while working with individuals that have experienced traumatic bereavement. The goal of therapist's utilizing a CBT-REBT approach is to facilitate an adaptive grief process, which does not mean absolving all pain and yearning for the deceased, but promoting a more adaptive process of grief. CBT-REBT therapists also strive to assist an individual or family to become a source of support for each other as they experience grief as a way to also increase a more intimate relationship with those still alive (Malkinson & Brask-Rustad, 2013). Central to CBT-REBT in traumatic bereavement is how the person perceives and appraises the traumatic loss, as well as emotions, physiological, and behavioural responses. Moreover, cognitions are central to understanding emotional disturbance and indicate the choice a person has in interpreting a "choiceless" event such as loss (Attig 1996).

The major tenet in CBT-REBT is the distinction between the adaptive and maladaptive course of grief, and the belief that this irrational thinking can be modified by applying a variety of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural techniques aimed at assisting clients to adapt to the new reality and to reorganize the inner relationship with the deceased (Malkinson 2007). Thus, in CBT-REBT, a distinction is made between "rational" adaptive thinking which results in appropriate emotional consequences of sadness and "irrational" maladaptive thinking which results in prolonged distress and depression (Neimeyer 2006).

In addition to CBT-REBT, there are a few other interventions that are used in therapeutic work with clients who have experienced grief and loss. According to Malkinson, Rubin, and Witztum (2006), one of these interventions is Letter-Writing, which is a strategic cognitive-

constructivist intervention. Letter writing is a way for a client to reorganize their life following the loss, as well as a way to work towards re-constructing their disrupted life's narrative. Using letter-writing in the therapy room requires the counsellor to prepare the client for the possible emotional turmoil this intervention may cause; however, counsellors should explain that letter writing typically leads to emotional relief as a consequence. Letter-writing also helps clients gain a sense of control over their negative emotions including anger, guilt, and resentment that may arise after the loss of a loved one, which could result in a more balanced way of remembering the deceased (Malkinson et. al, 2006). According to Beder (2005), it is common for bereaved individuals to remain connected to the deceased, and that these connections offer solace and comfort, easing the transition from the past to the present.

I mentioned above the idea of staying connected with the bereaved. And, in my understanding, my role as a therapist and my aim as a writer of this document could be to normalize the experience of grief and to encourage clients to understand the value of re-building and re-connecting with the deceased. I will strive to tell my clients that this connection with the deceased does not make them stuck in the past, but that it has a value to transition from past to present. And, I believe that this transition can be similar to when I started my journey from looking back at the bridge. I shared with you, my readers, how I was able to understand some of me and my family's behaviours after the death of my brother. The value of this insight is not limited to having an understanding of certain behaviours, but it also brought a certain level of contentment and clarity in my life. I feel as if I am now seeing sunshine after a long period of fog. I feel as if the pieces of a puzzle are finally fitting together. I can see hope and an ability to move forward in life with his sense of hope.

As a helping professional, my main purpose of writing this document was to share my personal story with you, my readers, and to pass on this message of hope, love, and kindness to those around me. As I am moving forward in life, I want to include all who are with me in this journey, all those I mentioned in my acknowledgements, all those I work with as a professional, and all those I will be working with as a helper. I want to include each and everyone in this process of personal healing. With this hope, I am ending this chapter, this document, and this one year journey of mine. I again hope that I was able to clearly and thoughtfully pass on my message to you by sharing not once, but several times, what this document means to me.

I would also like each of you, my readers, to know that this document has allowed me to open up and to be fully vulnerable by sharing my most intense experiences related to grief and loss. I would like to let you know that writing this document has been an intense process for me: I have shared my story of falling apart in life and how I was able to put myself together again. It seemed as if my openness and vulnerability served as a route to build strong connections with each and every one of my readers. With the help of this felt connection, I could sense –from the beginning of writing this chapter until the end – that my passion was growing with every breath I took and every moment I lived. This passion strengthened me and kept me determined throughout this journey as I shared my lived experiences from the first word to this very last page. It is my hope that this passion and sense of determination has helped me pass on a message of love, hope, and kindness, for passing along these positive messages was the main purpose for writing this document. And, passing on a message of love, hope, and kindness has also become an ultimate purpose in life for me. It is also my hope that this document has helped you, my readers. I hope that some of you were able to relate to my experience and that you were able to

learn – personally and/or professionally – from the words I have shared with you from deep within my soul, as well as from the literature. I also hope that while I am on this journey of re-learning the world, at the same time, you can also have an opportunity to re-define, re-connect, and re-learn the world around you.

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Appendix I

CityUniversity
of Seattle

Institutional Review Board

Review Response Form

Principal Investigator (if faculty research)
Student Researcher: Hufsa Iqbal
Faculty Advisor: Christopher Kinmann
Department: DASC/MC

Project Title: Potential for personal growth in Grief and Loss: A Personal Journey of re-learning the world.

Approved on: April 25, 2016
Renewal Date: April 25, 2017

Full Board Meeting
Expedited Review   (US)
Delegated Review   (Can) X
Exempt

CERTIFICATION
City University of Seattle has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The Faculty Advisor Christopher Kinmann and the student researcher Hufsa Iqbal have the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original Ethics Review Protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process or documents. Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board's consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS
In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the IRB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion.