

RUNNING HEAD: FOR DEATH IS BUT A PASSING PHASE OF LIFE

*For Death is But a Passing Phase of Life: Riding The Grief Waves Resulting From The Death of
Pet and Human Loss Within a Culturally Fluid World*

By

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Abstract

We, as living beings, all cross paths with death of others and of ourselves, as well as the grief that follows. However, people in many cultures and societies are often discouraged from talking about death and dying. Death and grief as a result of it happen in response to not only human loss, but also from pet loss. In fact, the number of people who own pets has increased over the years. Furthermore, the world has become smaller and more mobile, with many people migrating and immigrating to cultures and societies that might lack culturally sensitive supports for those in grief. A review of the literatures also found a lack of supports in pet loss and grieving individuals who live in a fluid world in which they negotiate different sets of meanings and values. This autoethnographic thesis aims to explore the lived experience of an international student who is grieving both the loss of a pet and a human while struggling with the values and meanings of living in a fluid world. Results show that grief is unique and ongoing. The importance of death rituals and its possible impact on grief are also studied. Implications for counselling are offered.

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Dedication

Rabu, my beloved furry friend, sister, and therapist

1999 – 2014

&

My Grandma

1925 – 2014

“na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin”

For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time

Bhagavad Gita 2.20

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Chapter 1 – Prologue: Death as Another Beginning

Death as a Part of Life and as The Law of Nature

“For death is but a passing phase of life” (para. 46), the poet Leibfreed wrote (n.d.). The journey to death starts since the moment of birth; death is the law of nature. No matter how hard we try to stay away from it, all earthlings die at some point – death is an inevitable part of life. One by one, someone we know will die in our lifetime, and each of us will witness the death of others during the course of our own lives. At some point in our lives, we will also lose our loved ones – our parents, siblings, friends, pets, etc. – to death. We will grieve those losses as we witness each death. Subsequently, we also will die in the end, and someone will grieve our death. Grief and bereavement are a result of losses we go through, whether that is from death, separation, dislocation, or losing a physical or psychological ability; the list goes on. Grief refers to a normal reaction and experience following a significant loss (Park & Halifax, 2011; Winokuer & Harris, 2012). Winokuer and Harris (2012) further define loss as lack of something that is meaningful and important. Grief is also a mental process as it evokes “shock, denial, numbness, anger, longing, yearning, searching, disorganization, despair, and potential reorganization” (Park & Halifax, 2011, p. 355) – many emotions, thoughts, and processes go through one’s mind. Additionally, no grief experience or reaction is the same. Winokuer and Harris (2012) suggest that proper care and attention should be given for those suffering from significant loss as this grieving process could be hurtful to them. Because we love and care about someone or something, many of us feel loss and emptiness when those we cherish disappear. Each loss and grief we experience is different and can be complex. In fact, grief could be more complicated than some people may think. Moreover, each grieving individual experience and process grief in their own, unique ways. This uniqueness of grief and how people grieve are

influenced by different factors, for example: “personality traits, the presence of concurrent stressors and previous losses, the nature of the losses, and the social expectations that are present” (Winokuer & Harris, 2012, p. 26).

Grief and Bereavement

Grief may bring pain and sadness – or even anger – to a person at times. Some grieving people feel intense emotions while processing their grief. These feelings and emotions come and go like the waves of the ocean. There are days when they feel fine and happy, not thinking about the deceased. But there are also days when they feel like drowning with the intense emotions of sadness, anger, helplessness, emptiness, to list a few. Although many grieving individuals would ride the waves of emotions – some may laugh while others cry (Bonanno, 2009), or some might surrender “to the natural rhythms of grief” (Romanyshyn, 1999) –, some people may feel relieved after witnessing the death of someone. Such relief may come for various reasons, having taken care of that person for a long time, for example. After a while though, grieving individuals not only experience less intense emotions but the waves of emotions also become calmer. They might have more days when they feel happy and content, and fewer days when they feel crappy, unlike at the beginning of their journey through grief. That is a natural course of grief. The philosopher Watts once said: “But we live in a culture where it has been rubbed into us in every conceivable way that to die is a terrible thing. And that is a tremendous disease from which our culture, in particular, suffers” (Life Eternal, 2015, 3:21). Even just talking about death is a big taboo in many societies and cultures. Many people do not even want to talk about their own death or someone close to them. Instead of talking about death, many people and scientists have been trying to find the ‘cure’ to death – immortality. But in spite of avoiding talking and

thinking, and all the research about immortality, we all die no matter what. In other words, death and grief are always following us wherever we go, no matter where we try to hide.

For many people, grief itself is a difficult thing to go through regardless of who they are, where they are from, and what their past experience might be. In fact, Northcott and Wilson (2008) state that “the social institutions – family, religion, the health care system, the legal system, and the funeral industry” (p. 67) influence the ideas and practices of death, as well as grief in our society. Hence grief and its experience are interconnected by many factors which can make it difficult to comprehend. Moreover, if individuals are going through grief – one of the most difficult times in life – without culturally sensitive support, they could feel and be socially isolated.

The Beginning of My Grief Journey

In 2014, I lost two important beings who died within three months of each other. The first death was my beloved family pet. One of many unique aspects about this loss is my grief experience within the context of pet loss. I have witnessed death and experienced grief more than once before; however, this was my first death of a pet / animal companion. I also did not have the opportunity to partake in any death rituals after her death. My grandmother died less than three months after my beloved dog died. Even though I was fortunate enough to be able to attend her funeral – keeping in mind that not every grieving individual has an opportunity to attend a funeral for various reasons (such as finance or distance) –, I was unable to practice other death rituals that followed after her funeral. Not only were these losses unexpected to some degree, but I also have experienced these instances of grief, especially the mourning of the losses and death rituals, in the culture and the society with which I did not identify personally; I was born and raised in Japan and have moved to Canada in my adulthood as an international student (since

2006). Although I had support from people around me, I did not have the supports which are culturally familiar.

Being an international student in Canada. My personal experiences are one of a kind because we all have our own unique worldviews. Yet, this does not mean I am not alone in events like these I have experienced. In reality, I am one of many temporary residents who are in Canada for various reasons and who are often times alone, away from their family. In addition to that, the total population of Canada consists of 20.6% foreign-born population in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2016); this could mean that one out of ten individuals might live in a fluid world in which they negotiate different sets of meaning and values from different cultural and social values. Furthermore, temporary residents are only about 1% of the total estimated population of Canada; in 2013, there are 118,024 temporary foreign workers (Citizenship and Immigration of Canada, 2014) and 304,876 international students in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration of Canada, 2014). Another important thing to note is that there has been increasing numbers of refugees fleeing to Canada, away from their familiarities and their cultural traditions. There is also anecdotal evidence that majority of people who access to the British Columbia Bereavement Helpline where I have volunteered seem to: speak English as their mother tongue, have Anglo-Saxon names, and/or have been born in Canada (K. Ratchford, personal communication, January 30, 2015). The British Columbia Bereavement Helpline offers its users information and refers them to the services they are seeking (i.e., counselling and a support group). With this information in mind, I wonder if grieving temporary or permanent residents, or people of different cultural and societal values from general ones, might have less access to such available services and support in a community, perhaps due to language and cultural barriers, for example.

Grieving death of an animal companion. I also would like to bring an attention to grief resulting from the death of a pet. The Canadian veterinary medical association (2011) estimates that 35% of Canadian households have dogs and 38% of them own cats. For many pet owners, a family pet is indeed a family member, and many people develop a strong bond and attachment with their animals. Therefore, some pet owners experience grief and emotions that come with pet loss. However, some people, especially someone who never had an animal as a pet, might not understand the significance and impact of grief after the death of an animal companion. Hence I think it is important to investigate grief from death of a pet.

The Reason Why I am Writing About My Grief Experiences for Thesis

This thesis has evolved and changed over time as I was processing my own grief in my own way, with expectation of how this thesis ‘should’ look in my eyes. Because I was compelled to process and share my experience, I have decided to write this thesis through autoethnography. Even though this thesis may not impact the whole research community or general public, I have chosen to share my grief and its process I have been experiencing because I want to let readers like yourself know that your grief experience is unique and special in your own way, no matter who you have lost and how crazy you might be feeling because of the grief. If sharing my grief process would impact someone who is in the midst of grief storm in some way, I think and hope that sharing my story would serve to help them through their grief journey.

What You Can Expect For The Rest of This Thesis

Throughout this thesis, readers will experience the fluid world in which I have created and lived within a cross-cultural context, along with my struggles to negotiate the worlds and sets of meanings that have been evoked by the deaths of my beloved beings. In chapter two, I will explain how I deliver this thesis. I will address how researchers are able to express and share

their personal experience – often times something very close to their heart – in academic contexts to bring something beneficial to fellow researchers and readers. I will also explain how I use autoethnography as a research method to provide an objective insight into my grief experience. Followed in chapter three, my experiences and processes will be shared; readers will learn what it was like for me to experience grief over my losses during the first year in chapter three, and then in chapter four, I will relate my experience in the second year following their death. After a close look of my recent grief journey, I will identify themes in my experiences that are similar to the existing researches. Finally in chapter five, I will present the summary of my story as well as findings from literatures. In addition to that, I will discuss and address the limitations of this study. I will conclude this thesis with the implications from this research and recommendations for counsellors.

Chapter 2 – Delivery of My Story: Story Telling as a Research Method

Different Research Designs

For this study, I have chosen to use a qualitative research method, specifically an autoethnography. While quantitative researches are often used in a scientific research, such as to determine an effect of a medication by comparing a group with a controlled group, qualitative methods are commonly used in the context of social sciences (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Hanson, 2008). Moreover, while quantitative research methods use statistical measurement/analysis to observe results, qualitative research methods generally explore experiences of individuals or ‘research subjects’ (Slife & Melling, 2012). Slife and Melling (2012) further state that two methodologies vary in ways of epistemology (how we know what we know and what counts as knowledge), symbolism (translating the world), and metaphysics (thinking about the world). Quantitative research methods seek universal and generalized knowledge with statistical measurements whereas qualitative methods gather personal experiences through verbal and non-verbal communications (Slife & Mellings, 2012). In addition to that, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding patterns of meaning people give to their experiences while quantitative researchers examine the laws of nature and cause-and-effect relationships (Slife & Melling, 2012). Hence results and measurements of quantitative methods could often be used to generalize. On the other hand, because of the uniqueness of individuals’ experiences and subjectivity, analysis of qualitative research methods is usually hard to generalize (Hanson, 2008; Mendenhall, Pratt, Phelps, & Baird, 2012; Slife & Melling, 2012).

An autoethnography is a qualitative research method. Adam and Ellis (2011) write that an author of autoethnography “selectively writes about meaningful experiences – those epiphanies – that are made possible by being part of a culture and from possessing a particular cultural

identity” (p. 199) and “analyze[s] these epiphanies by comparing them to existing research [...], and using their academic training to interrogate the meaning of an experience ” (p. 199). Bochner (2012) also explains that an autoethnography aims to connect “social sciences to humanities through storytelling” (p. 156). In other words, a personal experience is academically presented in a narrative form to understand a unique experience within the cultural context (Adams & Ellis, 2011). Human beings are unique individuals and so are their personal experiences, encounters, and interpretations; our experiences are very subjective. Although an autoethnography could be a personal story in an academic context, it also needs to be somewhat applicable to others (Ellis et al., 2011). Adams and Ellis (2011) along with Philaretou and Allen (2006) further suggest that participating in an autoethnographic research could be therapeutic to a study participant(s). Although some study participants might find telling a personal experience difficult to share, this experience of story telling could also be rewarding and participants might have the opportunity to self-reflect on their experience (Anderson, 2006).

The word *autoethnography* can be divided into three consisting words: auto-, ethno-, and –graphy (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis et al., 2011). *Auto-* means self (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis et al., 2011). *Ethno-* means race or culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis et al., 2011). *Graphy-*, on the other hand, can be described as process of a research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis et al., 2011). Therefore, an autoethnography means scholarly self-reflection and description of one’s experience within the context of culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis et al., 2011). Moreover, an autoethnography could provide readers a living experience of the culture of which she is a part.

Mentioning the role of a researcher also might seem important. Unlike any other research designs, a researcher in an autoethnography can be a participant while conducting her research.

In fact, authors of their studies being research participants are common with an autoethnography method (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Anderson (2006) states that the researcher is involved in the study as her worldview affects how she analyzes and describes the study result. Unlike results of qualitative methods, which are often statistical, the result of an autoethnography is, more often than not, delivered in a form of narrative (Adams & Ellis, 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Even though there may be a possibility of a study result being biased due to the subjective nature of personal involvements, academically sharing one's personal experience would allow the researcher to look deeply into the experience and find some cultural relations (Bochner, 2012).

Ethical Consideration in Autoethnography

Every researcher needs to be aware of ethical consideration if they recruit living beings, especially people as study participants. Each research conducting a study on human subjects must keep in mind not only any potential risks of harm but also the need for confidentiality. Therefore, to protect confidentiality of research participants, any individuals referenced in a study will often have their names and contexts changed, especially in qualitative research methods. In this study, I am the sole study subject and I will only be disclosing my personal encounter and experience of grief. I will be describing my life experience in this autoethnography, which in many ways has been influenced by people around me, especially my family. However due to the nature of autoethnography which I describe my life experience, I may mention some people without specifically identifying them, especially my family, in a way that readers may perhaps recognize their identities. Therefore, to protect confidentiality of the participants, any individuals possibly referenced in this study will have their names and contexts changed. In addition to that, because of the relationships we have, my family – including myself – has signed consent forms, which they have been provided with Japanese translated forms. The

consent forms explained to them potential risks while I conduct this research, along with their acknowledgements of my thesis and their influence on my experience.

Sharing a personal story or story has the potential to ‘stir up’ unresolved issues (i.e., past trauma); hence providing study participants some extra supports is encouraged. Those supports could be a counselling and peer support for some; some may engage in exercises. In other words, engaging in self-care has an important part to play while conducting researches, especially in qualitative researches.

Instruments and Data Collection

Memory and self-reflection were used as a data collection in this study. Memory is a recollection of past events, but it does not mirror or present the exact past event (Monaco, 2010). Memory and self-reflection can take different forms and engagements, such as recording (video and/or audio), writing, drawing, or photographs. Furthermore, the context of the event might affect the accuracy and reliability of memory recall (Snelgrove & Havitz, 2010). Holmes as well as Walker, Vogl, and Thompson (as cited in Crawley, 2010) state that originally experienced memories with strong emotions lose their intensity over time. This fading of the original emotion would help reduce the possible interference when one is recalling the memory (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce as cited in Crawley, 2010). In addition to that, grief may affect memory of a grieving individual. Because of the fact of accepting the reality of someone’s death, cognition of some griever may be impacted (Shear, Boelen, & Neimeyer, 2011). The contexts of memories also reconfigure and change at times. For example, some people might only have ‘negative’ memories of a deceased right after the death for whatever reasons, but those memories may turn into positive ones as time goes by. In other words, the collection of data in this study might lack

the original meaning and intensity of the events I have experienced. Nonetheless, I will reflect on those events as truthfully, reliable, and authentically as possible.

Data Analysis

This paper is written in a narrative form and includes my recollection of a previous state of mind, what I was feeling (or not feeling), as well as self-reflection on the grieving process that I engaged in while taking courses. As someone who lives in two different cultures and societies fluidly, this paper will put emphasis on how an intercultural context and fluidity may impact grieving. While keeping a journal could have helped me recall my feelings and thoughts in the wake of the death of my dog Rabu and grandmother, the narrative component of my autoethnographic work has helped me revisit and reflect on my grieving process, together with bringing my memories of grief to the surface. I have detailed memories of a timeline – so to speak – of the events followed after their death and how I was right after their death because their death was so significant to me. Putting these memories into words evoked more memories; as a matter of fact, the process of writing this study has greatly helped my memories to arise; this thesis seemed to turn into my journal.

Chapter 3 – Death and Grief at Last

Death of Rabu

Rabu and me. Rabu, our beloved family dog, has very special place in my heart. She died at the age of 14 years and 11 months in April 2014. She became a member of our family when I was 15 years old. At that time, I was struggling with myself and my life in general. I was struggling to meet the expectation others had of me while simultaneously going through puberty. My body was changing the way I did not want it to or expect, all the while my brain was taken over by hormonal changes; no one had told me what I should have expected during puberty. At age 14, I started engaging in self-harm to alleviate emotions – especially anger – because I did not know – or even feel – how to express them. In Japanese culture and society where I was raised, expressing anger is not encouraged or accepted because the emotion could disrupt the harmony of a group. In other words, the importance of a group comes before individual needs since collectivism is the main value of the culture and the society. I would cut myself or punch walls whenever my bucket of emotions was full; there was a lid to the bucket so that I did not need to feel anything. But because the bucket had the lid on it, there was limit to how much emotion it could keep contained. A year later, at age 15, I started to restrict my eating – my struggle with eating had begun. At the beginning, I restricted myself from eating food (i.e., anorexic), then I binged ate (i.e., bulimic). The two ‘symptoms’ came and went alternatively every couple of months. I also did not have dreams or ideas of what I wanted to become. Because of that, more than once I thought about ending my life; I thought to myself, “what is the point of living if I have nothing to look forward to?”. I did not see a point of living. I hated myself – what I was and who I was – so much, for such a long time. I was so uncomfortable being in my own skin. Although people around me thought that I needed help because I had lost

a lot of weight, I did not believe that I was sick. I thought I felt totally fine and I saw myself as fat in a mirror; I did not see myself objectively or perceived myself in the same way as others saw me.

In Japan, mandatory education ends at age 15. Thus whoever wants to go to high school is required to take an entrance exam, and majority of junior high school students do go to a high school. I asked my parents to get me a golden retriever if I got into one of the top public high schools in Tokyo. They agreed, and I was looking forward to it very much. It was summer time and I had lost a significant amount of weight by then, to the point that I was recommended to be hospitalized if I would lose another five kilograms (approximately 11 pound). Perhaps because my parents were quite concerned about my physical well-being, they took me to a breeder who had two golden retriever puppies for sale. I was happy but confused inside, and I did not show any emotions because I was being a teenager – being rebellious. In fact, I acted as though I was annoyed because I had to go outside with my family – typical teenager! And a few weeks after the visit, we had a 3-month old golden retriever puppy. She was so fluffy and cuddly; she was a bundle of life and joy. I instantaneously fell in love with her. We named her Rabu, meaning ‘love’ in English.

Did I get better? No. I still struggled with who I was, what and who I wanted to become; I was still cutting myself, punching walls, and enduring sharp fluctuations of my weight. But no matter what I was going through, Rabu was there for me, sitting beside me and looking at me, almost as if she was saying, “I am here for you”. She has given me comfort when I felt nobody was supporting me or I was not understood. I still remember one specific evening when everyone was eating dinner but I was having hot milk on the kitchen floor as my dinner. I was restricting my diet at this time, to the point of calculating every single food intake I had. Rabu sat next to

me and waited until I had finished my 'meal' instead of waiting under the table for someone to drop food like she always had done. There was no judgment or concern; she was just sitting there right next to me. Rabu may have been a dog but she was more than that to me; she was a sister, a friend, and a non-judgmental being. I developed a special bond with her; she provided me unconditional love, a judgmental-free attitude, and a safe place to be myself.

I left Japan to study English abroad for about three months when I was 21. The joy and happiness Rabu expressed when I came back home was heart warming; she was so excited to see me, wagging her tail off like crazy and whining as though she was saying "I missed you! Where have you been?!" I left Japan again to come to Canada to pursue my academic career when I turned 22. Rabu was 6 years old by then. Again, she was very excited to see me whenever I visited my family, welcoming me at the front door, wagging her tail, up until to the last few visits before she died. We even communicated by using Skype; she recognized my voice but she seemed quite puzzled when trying to figure out where my voice was coming from.

Her health deteriorated gradually as she aged. As many golden retriever experience, Rabu had both hip issues and tumours. She had surgery to remove the tumours on her back and breast years back; she also underwent an emergency surgery for ovarian cysts. Because of her age and her previous experiences, my parents decided to let the tumours be when Rabu started to be covered with tumours in her later life.

Then Rabu died. I would take care of Rabu whenever I went back to Japan visiting my family. I would take her for walks in the morning, evening, and night. I fed her and I brushed her almost every day. I gave her all the attentions and love I could give at any given moment although she sometimes demanded more or less of it. Because of the pain in her hips, she was not able to go up stairs to the living room, neither could she run or walk normally. Rabu was getting

older and weaker; though the change was subtle, it was evident. In fact, dogs age much faster than humans (Bastian, 2015). One day, she was running for food, three months later she was not able to run anymore; she could only limp on her back legs. A few weeks after, she was not able to stand up on her own. Less than a month after, she stopped eating and within a few days, on April 25, she died.

I knew from the moment I left Japan the very first time to come to Canada that I would not be in Japan when Rabu died. With that in my mind, I had said goodbye to her like I meant it each time I visited my family. Towards the end of her life, I also told her that she did not need to wait for me to come back; she was free to go whenever she decided that it is her time.

I prepared myself when I was notified that Rabu stopped eating – one of my grandmothers died three days after she stopped eating. This gave me an approximate timeline of her death. I was also fortunate enough to be put on Skype just after she died, and my family was kind enough to include me as much as they could. I saw the dead body which Rabu used to be in. It was surreal but altogether too real. But the fact was, she was not there anymore. What I saw when I would see Rabu was now gone from the body I saw over Skype, which was alien to me. What I saw was hairy animal that I did not really recognize. I did not feel fear or disgust in seeing the dead body. But I was not able to ‘attach’ myself to or cry over the remains, because I simply did not see my beloved Rabu in them. In addition to that, I also felt that I was an outsider, observing the processes my family was engaging in; I watched them clean her body and say their goodbyes. Interestingly enough, I was able to observe my position as it was happening. While they were doing what they were doing, I felt somewhat detached from the whole thing. I was witnessing what they were doing and their initial reaction to the death of Rabu. I was grateful to be invited to witness her death via Skype, but I felt like I was not involved in the event. I was

like a researcher observing study participants through a one-way mirror. I was seeing the dead body of Rabu without any physical or emotional connections towards it.

Right after her death. As I expected and prepared myself for the death of Rabu, I was here in Vancouver, doing the things I always did when she died. Everything looked the same to me; Rabu had not been in my ‘regular’ life for eight years at that point. My life in Vancouver has not been affected by her presence regardless of her death. But I knew and felt her absence in this world and in my life. I was not feeling it physically but I knew cognitively and emotionally that she was now dead – she will no longer be at the front door when I open it the next time I visit Japan.

Of course, I was extremely sad that Rabu was now gone. I closed my eyes to either calm down or feel the sadness. I repeated *lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu*, meaning ‘may all beings everywhere be happy and free’ in Sanskrit (Gannon, 2010). I felt some comfort in knowing that she was no longer in pain or discomfort. Instead of the pain or whatever she had been feeling, she was now free from the pain and running around freely. Perhaps, I was rationalizing her death instead of feeling it. During this time I also remembered this story:

Just this side of heaven is a place called Rainbow Bridge.

When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone here, that pet goes to Rainbow Bridge.

There are meadows and hills for all of our special friends so they can run and play together.

There is plenty of food, water and sunshine, and our friends are warm and comfortable.

All the animals who had been ill and old are restored to health and vigor; those who were hurt or maimed are made whole and strong again; just as we remember them in our dreams of days and times gone by.

The animals are happy and content, except for one small thing; they each miss someone very special to them, who had to be left behind.

They all run and play together, but the day comes when one suddenly stops and looks into the distance. His bright eyes are intent; His eager body quivers. Suddenly he begins to run from the group, flying over the green grass, his legs carrying him faster and faster.

You have been spotted, and when you and your special friend finally meet, you cling together in joyous reunion, never to be parted again. The happy kisses rain upon your face; your hands again caress the beloved head, and you look once more into the trusting eyes of your pet, so long gone from your life but never absent from your heart.

Then you cross Rainbow Bridge together.... (Rainbow Bridge, n.d.)

Some people may think that I was trying to avoid feeling the emotions like I used to do (or still do). I was sad but I also thought that Rabu was now finally at peace. Since Rabu and I did not have the same language to communicate, she could not express where it hurt. But the truth of her death was that she did not need to suffer anymore, and I could find comfort in that. Or this thought is my perspective as a human being. I was experiencing the death of Rabu cognitively and intellectually as well as emotionally. I had a couple of sleepless nights, I lost my appetite, and I had a hard time focusing. I felt like I was in a deep ocean; my surroundings kept moving like the ocean flow while I was just a big heavy rock in the bottom of the ocean. I constantly felt heaviness in my chest.

A year after death of Rabu (written in 2015). I still have a difficult time approaching a golden retriever without getting emotional. Regardless of whether someone dies or not, life goes on no matter what. My life went on with schoolwork like nothing has changed. The only thing that had changed was that Rabu was no longer with me.

About a month after her death, I went back to Japan to visit my grandmother who was in the hospital, recovering from surgery she had in March of 2014. I then finally saw the ashes of Rabu. The cinerary urn did not look anything like her; it was just a rounded ceramic jar wrapped in a white cloth. So that I could experience and feel what she was seeing during the final moments of her life, I lay down on the spot on which she usually laid and where she took her the very last breath. She no longer woke me up in the morning to take her for a walk and to feed her. Although I felt happy not to be woken up at six in the morning, I also felt something was missing from my daily routine in Japan. I would miss her the most when I was vacuuming the house, which was surprising to me. I have found that vacuuming is much easier now but also boring because there is no shed hair and Rabu is not lying on the floor blocking the way. This might sound stupid, but small things like this reminded me of her death. One time, several months after her death I woke up because I heard Rabu barking. This might have just been my imagination but it was at the exact time she would bark in the morning. Rabu is gone, but the memory and the presence of her still remain with me.

I still miss her greatly and I am having a difficult time fully accepting her death. Perhaps me not having participated in any of the rituals associated with her death might have something to do with it. Many cultures, societies, and families – including health care systems – ‘expect’ grieving individuals to ‘get over’ and ‘move along’ with their lives after a certain amount of time passes. As a result of expectations or what seems ‘normal’, some people might start to think that

there could be something wrong with them because they are still feeling sad and having difficult time getting through their day since the death of the loved one. I identify with that feeling. It has been about a year passed since Rabu died. But I am still struggling with the overwhelming emotions. I have imagined that these feelings would be gone by now; instead, I am feeling sadder than right after her death. Not only that, the waves of grief hit me more often than last year. I then started to wonder, *“is this normal? Should my grieving be have been over by now? What is wrong with me?”* Oddly and sadly – in my opinion –, the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-5) suggests that some people could be ‘diagnosed’ with complicated grief, which is a persistent complex bereavement disorder, and the criterion of this diagnosis is to experience “symptoms” for at least six months (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Winokuer and Harris (2012) describe this complicated grief as the bereaved individual experiencing “prolonged acute grief symptoms” (p. 147). Even though many of us have never been taught how to go about grieving, there seems to be an unwritten script of how we are ‘supposed to’ express and ‘deal with’ grief. In addition to that, if a bereaved person is not following the script, she could be told that she might need some expert help to deal with her grief. *I was writing this section in 2015, a year after death of Rabu; even so, I was still feeling the pain of her death. Not only that, I expected to go along with my life with the memories of Rabu instead of missing her terribly. With all that in my mind, the words ‘complicated grief’ suddenly popped in my head, making me wonder: ‘am I not normal that I am still grieving my dog?’*

Regardless of a ‘label’ or possible diagnosis, no two instances of grief or loss are the same, and each person experiences grief and loss in their own way. Because no death and grief are the same, grieving individuals, including myself, often face unique grief processes. Some

might express their grief through arts (e.g., music, painting), sharing and talking with others, or dancing, while some might process their grief through journaling or doing nothing. There is also no timeline to how long or short the initial grief – for the lack of a better term – should last; there is no timeline or clock. Pathologizing grief, to me, seems like a Western perspective that is based on medical models; as Prechtel (2015) states, “grief is natural” (p. 3), “grief is necessary” (p. 3), and “grief is not depression” (p. 5). I have not sought help for ‘dealing with’ this grief specifically as I have some coping skills and I know how to deal with my emotions, not to mention I have not found the need for it. At the same time, I am hesitant to say that people would understand what I have gone through. I lost someone very important to me, but that someone was an animal, not a human being. Some people who might have not had pets in their lives may say that it is just a dog. But pets are not just animals; they are companions to many pet owners. Although pets have significantly shorter life span than us humans, they become a part of our family, our friends, and an integral part of our life. To me, Rabu was a sister, a friend, and a therapist. She did not ask for much, except food, walk, and a lot of petting, belly rubs included. But she has given me so much. As living beings, we all die no matter what species we are; this is an inevitable fact. Cowles (as cited in Wrobel & Dye, 2003) suggests that the closer the relationships we have and the stronger the bonds they are, the stronger are the emotional reactions to the loss. As I left Japan at age 21, Rabu was not really a direct part of my life for years. But she was always in my heart, as she will always be. I will have another golden retriever in the near future; but no other golden retriever will be the same as her or replace her. Only Rabu is Rabu, and that will never change. I will probably forget some memories that I have about her as time goes by, but she always has a special place in my heart.

Death of Grandmother

My grandma and I. My grandmother – the closest of my grandparents and the last remaining one I had – died rather unexpectedly at the beginning of July, 2014. Her death was less than three months after Rabu's. My grandmother lived at less than a five-minute walk from our home, so I have spent a lot of times at her home since I was a baby. Her place also became a shelter for me when I was struggling with myself; I would go there right after I got home from school, until it was dinnertime. I would watch TV and eat ice creams while helping my grandmother with things like bringing dinner to my late grandfather. I even became one of his primary caregivers in his later life as he had become weaker and he had to spend most of his time in bed. I would take him to and helped him in the bathroom, I would attend when he ate, and I would support him when he walked. I spent my time after school at their home almost everyday. Even after he died, I would visit my grandmother very often until I left Japan. Whenever I visited Japan, I was her listener; she – as a rule – never cried in front of people, yet she cried at least once during my visits. Looking back, I can understand why she was like that to me: she felt safe enough to be vulnerable with me.

Her diagnosis. My grandmother was 88 years old but had not really had any major health issues in her entire life. But when she got checked for colorectal cancer in 2013, her result came back undetermined and it was recommended she go through further tests. That was at the end of 2013. Although my mother is the youngest of two (assuming that older sibling is expected to have those important conversations), she had to tell my grandmother about the test result and the possibility of cancer. I happened to be in Japan when things were unfolding. I was also there with my mother when my grandmother went to the hospital for her first visit. She had to have a few tests to determine whether she indeed had colorectal cancer or not. She had to go through further tests to examine the possibility of stomach cancer when the final test for colorectal cancer

came back negative. She was then finally diagnosed with advanced stomach cancer and scheduled to have surgery in March. She agreed, or perhaps just agreed to what her doctor thought was the best treatment for her. I also accompanied her when she was admitted to the hospital, and I visited her almost everyday when I was in Japan in March of 2014. She was recovering very slowly after her surgery as she was not eating much; her stomach was now one third smaller than it used be, and she expressed that the hospital food was too sweet after eating it every day for the past few months. She had kept loosing weight as the result of that. My family was quite concerned; I even spoke with her over Skype, encouraging her to eat so that she could get better soon and go home. That was the goal she had; she just wanted to go back to her own home.

Due to the circumstance and in order to give my family a break, I also visited her in June during the term break. I again visited her almost every day. I would bring things she might eat, especially watermelons. I would bring some other items that she had requested. Whenever I visited her, she was timid and she even cried; her body was not recovering the way she might have imagined it would. She believed that she would have left the hospital less than a week after the surgery, while I thought that she would need more than a week to recover because of her age. She might have thought that her body was as though it was still in her twenties. Or maybe she had not accepted the fact that she was indeed sick; at least that is how I thought. To me, she seemed to be in denial. I asked her what has been bugging her mind just before her surgery – “are you scared of dying, grandma?”, I asked. I cannot recall other conversations we had but I clearly remember that day when she confidently said that she was not afraid of death.

She planned to go back to home on July 10th as she was staying in the floor more than three months at that point; the hospital where she stayed has a policy in which patients on the

surgical floors are only allowed to stay for three months at the most, unless the care is absolutely needed. She also went back to her home over weekends for a few times to get used to the life outside of the hospital. She even moved the hospital floor so that she might be more comfortable for the remaining days in the hospital. She was still not eating much and she spent most of her time lying down on the bed, but otherwise she was physically fine though I must say that she seemed mentally defeated to some degree.

Her sudden death. I headed back to Vancouver to attend the summer term on July 1st after visiting my family and grandmother over the term break in June. Everything was fine when I left; my grandmother was fine. However, her condition suddenly changed overnight, and she died on July 3rd, 2014. I was in shock and disbelief when I was informed that she died in the early morning. I had to ask which grandmother they were referring to even though she was the only grandparent alive. I burst into tears after I hung up on Skype. Then I felt angry at her: *why now, why today, why this time? I was there three days ago. You were fine. You came down to the elevator to say bye and waved at me until you could not see me anymore. But now, after sleeping two nights and getting back to my regular life, I need to fly back again?! How can you do that to me and to my mother, to those who have taken care of you the most while you were in the hospital (my mother was in Sri Lanka, trying to recharge her batteries before my grandmother returned to home)?* While I was going through this emotional turmoil, I also had to get tickets to go back to home as early as possible, re-packing what I just unpacked, and informing the school that I would not attend the first week of the classes. I was not even sure when I would return to Vancouver as the date of the funeral was not yet set at that time. Since I was not physically there and I was in the midst of mental chaos – disbelief, shock, and some anger – along with being sick (feverish, stuffed nose, and sore throat) and burnt out from visiting home, the death of my

grandmother did not really sink in until I actually saw her body. I also felt some degree of regret at one point; *did she die because my mom and I left, and no one was there to visit her? Would she still be alive if only I stayed with her a little bit longer? Was I hard on her when I left (we just moved her room before I headed out to the airport, and she requested me to buy a cup of watermelon when I needed to leave the hospital)?* Although I knew that it was not my fault that she had died – it was simply her time to go – and that my absence had nothing to do with her death, I felt some remorse just the same.

After her death. I did not see my grandmother in her remains; she was gone like when I saw Rabu's. To be honest, I was a little bit scared at first when I saw her body – her eyes were not completely closed and I felt like they were looking into me. The grandmother I knew was long gone. The body was cold and without any life energy or force. The person I knew was no longer there. The body looked like hers but without her energy, it did not look like her. Although she knitted her brows all the time while she was in the hospital – perhaps because she was in pain or discomfort – that was also gone. The only thing that was same was the smoothness of her facial skin. It remained that way until the moment her body was cremated.

The difference I felt in the death of my grandmother from death of Rabu was that I was able to participate in most of the death rituals. Because most, if not all, funerals are held along the customs of Buddhism in Japan, people keep burning incense for the deceased until the body is cremated. I witnessed her body being dressed for her journey after death, being confined, and leaving her own home for the very last time.

A Japanese funeral in the Buddhist style consists of two parts; first there is a wake in the evening, then there is the funeral early on the following day. I was able to attend both days. I cannot really recall the state of my mind or emotions through the process, but I was more attuned

with the needs of others and I provided emotional supports. I did not drop any tears while I was in Japan. I felt relieved that everything was done and I could go back home to Vancouver; but once there, especially when I arrived in Vancouver, I was able to let go.

Because of the ritualistic (or may be Buddhist) tradition, people join hands in prayer for the deceased. I have had no problems doing so before, but this time I struggled doing it. The death of Rabu has given me a new insight into death. When I saw the body of Rabu, I realized that what makes us who we are as beings is the energy and perhaps the spirit of the particular beings. The body and the skin we are in right now are just a shell we live in for as long as the heart is beating. I saw the bodies that Rabu and my grandmother were in. But because they left their shells, what I saw was just bodies rather than who they were before. Because I only saw the body but not my grandmother, I was not able to put my hands together in prayer. Some might say that I was in denial, and I might had been; but Rabu taught me something about living and dying, and my grandmother has in a sense shown me that what I have learned from the death of Rabu is my new perspective about life and death. In the end, I put my hands together in prayer because of the expectation of others attending the funeral, but my mind struggled to come to terms with why I found it difficult.

Returning to Vancouver. I came back to Vancouver a day after the funeral. Everything here was the same as when I left 10 days ago; the sun was shining and school kept going. I arrived in Vancouver on Sunday and I had to go back to school on the next day. I felt awkward and hesitant to go back to school as I did not want the shower of sympathy. My rational side and irrational side were having a debate on whether I should go to school or not; I knew I had to but I truly did not want to go. In the end I went to school on the next morning, Monday, as I had planned.

I felt numb most of the time for a while. I also felt like I was surrounded by the fog or by clouds since the death of my grandmother. My emotional state and mood were like waves in the ocean; they came and went. I felt totally fine some days but I also felt like crap other times. I thought that there was something wrong with me when I felt fine. I thought I should feel and be sad; instead, I felt nothing even though I was aware that the intense emotion of grief indeed comes and goes, and numbness can be a reactions to grief (Winokuer & Harris, 2012). Ironically, one of the courses I was taking in this term was Grief and Loss counselling. I felt numb and I was isolating myself from others. My body was also expressing my grief; I struggled with quite bad headaches and nausea. I literally experienced the truth about bereavement; each death and its grief vary from others. Yet I sometimes felt that I was judging my process of the two instances of grief as if I *should* have been feeling this or that way. But at the same time, I was able to tell and keep reminding myself that there was no right or wrong way to feel or experience grief; there were just the ways I was experiencing these particular grieving journey.

Although I was aware enough of what was going on inside of me in terms of feelings and emotions, I sometimes felt that the death of my grandmother was not real. Because I left Japan a day after the funeral, I was cut off from other rituals that took place until the 49th day from the death of my grandmother. Based on the Buddhist beliefs, many Japanese think that it takes 49 days for a deceased to reach the other side, so to speak, and people are encouraged – if not required – to offer incense sticks every day until the cremated ashes are put into the grave. Then around, but before, 49 days after the death, relatives get together again and lay the ashes to rest. I was not there throughout this time. I did not feel bad or disappointed about this; but I did feel left out to some degree from what could have been an important part of the process of grieving for me.

Chapter 4 – Life Goes On

Reflecting On The Two Deaths

Cultural and societal contexts. Although I do not identify myself with the Canadian (or North American) culture particularly, the cultural contexts in which I have found myself have affected how I have processed my experiences with grief. Within the Japanese cultural and societal contexts, people do not ask others how they feel. In fact, people do not share or express feelings with each other much because many Japanese people hold some sort of value that there is virtue in withholding emotions; to put it simply, Japanese people just do not talk about how they feel. I was not accustomed to express or pay attention to how I felt for a long time because I simply did not need to share my emotions or pay attention to them in Japan. In contrast, within the Canadian cultural context, not to mention during my attendance to this counselling program, I have become more aware of my feelings and emotions. I increasingly felt comfortable enough to pay attention to what is going on inside of me. As a result, I was able to put the numbness into words instead of ‘feeling’ nothing – being okay with feeling numb –, and I also observed my self-criticism. This is one of the differences that I have noticed in these grief processes. When one of my grandfathers to whom I was close died 12 years ago, I did not feel anything as though I was depressed; when he died, I wanted to do nothing or feel anything. My eating disorder was still in full swing at this time, so I was quite mentally ‘unstable’ and anorexia had a hold of me. My grieving processes with these recent losses, on the other hand, have affected me differently. As I have mentioned previously, I have experienced the grief more physically than psychologically. Not only that, I was able to notice my emotional turmoil while being comfortable with the ride. Being able to acknowledge my emotions and feelings may be due to being in a culture which makes it easier to express them. Furthermore, there are linguistic

differences between these two cultures about grief and loss. With English, the words *grief* and *loss* are used in appropriate contexts as well as being discussed. However, even though there are similar words to *grief* and *loss* in Japanese language, these words are not something people use or acknowledge often; perhaps simply because people do not talk about emotions or feelings associated with death and the emotions that come along with it. Japanese people are also 'expected' to read between the lines and understand the situation within Japanese culture, society, and its spoken language; it is 'expected' because it is rather a learned 'custom' or some sorts while growing up.

I have felt open to my grief process culturally as I have been aware of my emotions and feelings; yet, I have also felt socially alone and isolated. I am also not familiar with how this society and culture deal with death and grief. As I am aware of and know how to behave with regard to death within the Japanese culture and society, there are unspoken expectations of how others act in certain ways when someone has loss in their family. Nevertheless, because I have limited ideas of how this society in a general may or may not deal with, treat, or think about death and grief, I did not know how I 'should' have acted or behaved while grieving the losses of Rabu and my grandmother. *Should I be sad and cry? Should I smile? Do people expect me to say something? Do people expect me to reach out for help or talk to them about my feelings? Should I seek help or counselling?* In Canadian culture, I was encouraged to express my emotions and talk about my feelings, including my experience. On the other hand, I felt the need to withhold my emotions and restrain from sharing my journey while visiting Japan; I found myself being in the conflict between where I came from and where I was. Bonanno (2009) mentions about the contrast of Western culture and non-Western cultures regarding a grief experience of individuals. While individuals and their feelings and emotions of grief are paid attention to in Western

culture, in non-Western cultures, the focus is on how grieving individuals relate to one another and “what people do” (Bonanno, 2009, p. 48).

Not only I was unfamiliar with the cultural and social contexts of death and grief but I also did not know what ‘socially acceptable’ grief looks like. Grieving in Japan would have given me familiarity even if I had lived away from the society and culture for a decade. Nevertheless, I was not only here alone physically; I also did not have a psychological familiarity with grief within the Canadian culture and society. Many people within same cultures often grieve with people whom they lost in common, such as a family member. For example, they get together around the table and share meals for a certain period of time after the death. Though they might or might not talk about the deceased, the idea of going through the difficult time together may provide them togetherness and support. Even if family member do not share their experiences or feelings verbally, being with them during such difficult times could give grieving individuals some emotional and psychological comfort and familiarity. Each individual goes through grieving in a unique way; nonetheless, being with someone who has shared the event can provide similar effects to those of a support group or peer support. Supiano (2012) suggests that a support group for grieving people is not only to provide a therapeutic environment but also to give participants support for one another through sharing their experiences and feelings. While a family gathering could play a role of a support group, group participants can also sign up to attend such a group through community outreach. Moreover, people in the same culture and society have some understandings of what they ‘should’ and ‘should not’ do towards grieving individuals. Going through grief is not an easy thing for anyone, but if there is some unspoken understanding, then grieving individuals might have an easier time getting through their grief. The society and culture one identifies with would likely provide this understanding and

familiarity. Even though I have lived in Canada for a decade, I do not completely and totally identify myself with what-seems-like-a-visible ‘Canadian culture and its society’; and I have found and felt myself being alone. Fortunately, I have internal and external supports if I needed them. Internal supports could be something that I have in my self-care toolbox – or my strengths – whereas external supports would be counselling or talking to a friend, for example. But at the end of the day, I was alone, and I did not – or could not – participate in some of the death rituals while I was processing two losses simultaneously.

The most significant cultural and social difference I experienced was around the New Year. Within Japanese cultural and social contexts, people are discouraged from wishing a happy new year to someone who has lost a loved one within the passing year. Grieving individuals or family send out a letter notifying its recipients that they will be abstaining from celebrating New Year’s this coming year due to death in a family; there is a period of mourning in which the family of the deceased is encouraged to withhold from any celebratory events for a year. This period of mourning might perhaps be cultural and societal act of kindness to give mourners a space to grieve, and having some religious components to it. Northcott and Wilson (2008) describe mourning as public expression of grief; yet an individual can also mourn privately, silently, quietly, or even secretly. In Canadian culture and society, on the other hand, many people celebrate Christmas and New Year regardless of the death in the family even after a few months. “When in Rome do as the Romans do”; I understand the benefits of assimilation, yet I found myself struggling to express New Year’s wishes; the customary ritual took a strong hold on me. Where I came from allows me to practice the period of mourning; but there seems no such thing in the place which I am now (Canadian culture and society). I have found myself

struggling with the different cultural and social traditions and rituals about grief between where I came from and where I live now.

There are also commonalities in these two while there are differences. I tried to be as functional as I could under the circumstances since I felt that school was my priority; I did not really have ‘time’ to feel things or be with my grief. Or maybe I was avoiding feeling the sadness altogether, because it is easier not to feel and be sad. But the fact was: I have relied on schoolwork to move along my days. I had the sense that I was grieving the loss of my dog, but I was not really *with* my grief. Even after the death of my grandmother, I felt as though I had to stay put and keep myself sharp so that I could go through another term. Like my coping strategy immediately after Rabu died, through looking back, I buried myself into assignments and school to cope with my grief – I did not intend to do so though; but retrospectively as it became very clear to me that I really struggled throughout writing this thesis – many buried feelings and emotions revisited me again – , I chose to bury myself with schoolwork, not to feel or be with my grief.

Throughout my experience, I came to a conviction as the result of research and conversations that many societies seem not to allow bereaving individuals to grieve, nor does it give them enough time to grieve. Within many Westernized societies, grieving individuals are encouraged to ‘move on’ with their lives, hopefully as soon as they can. For example, in British Columbia, a grieving individual whose immediate family died is allowed to take “up to 3 days of unpaid leave” (BC Government, Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, and Skill Training, n.d.). Similarly, the Canada labour code also establishes the time line of 3-day bereavement leave (Human resources and skills development Canada, 2009). I think that no one can really ‘recover’ fully, put smiles on their faces, and be productive and functional three days after someone close to

them died. All the same, many people are resilient; many of us are capable and able to find ways to carry on with our lives even when things go wrong (Bonanno, 2009); we are naturally be resilient. What if the funeral is not held within the time frame? A person could potentially take paid leave if necessary, of course. But I wonder if three days is enough time to return to work when someone has only just died. Although I have previously expressed my disagreement of the pathologization of grief in the DSM-5, I do see a point in which some people who are diagnosed with a bereavement disorder may benefit by accessing the extended care they might need; being diagnosed could help those by possibly applying for a prolonged bereavement work leave without being penalized. I personally think that grief is not something to be penalized for, however. Regardless of the possible benefit of bereavement diagnosis in DSM-5, I wonder why society is somewhat inconsiderate to bereaving individuals. Although death is not a daily life event for many people, loss is an inevitable part of our life and we all go through that at some point in our lives. The degree of emotions may vary between people, but we all grieve in our own ways, especially when someone close dies. Our body, mind, and spirit integrate and intertwine with each other and with others, and we constantly change and move forward, even after someone dies. We try to cope the best way we know how. Many people try their best to go back to having a 'normal' life after a significant loss. But the truth is the grief never ends; it just comes and goes. Strong emotions sometimes have hit me out of the blue; but that is part of grief. I had to try to carry on and go through with my life while meeting the demands of school. Many people who have bereaved seem to understand the nature of grief, but many societies seem not to be empathic and compassionate enough towards grieving individuals; and that appears to be the same case both in Japan and Canada.

Importance of death rituals. From comparing those two different experiences, I have come to understand how participating in death rituals could have an impact on one's grief experience and process. I feel somehow wrong to say this, but I miss Rabu more than I miss my grandmother; much, much more. Rabu was in my life much less than my grandmother was, and some might say that she is a dog while grandma was a human being. Prechtel (2015) writes that bereaved individuals who lost their animal companions to death are sometimes "more capable of grieving" (p. 126) their losses, and being able to truly grieve more than they could have ever done with the death of another who are close to them. In hindsight, there were significant differences in how I experienced the two deaths and the accompanying grief: while I was fortunate to participate in the major death ritual – funeral – for my grandmother, I did not for Rabu. I prepared myself well in advance for the day Rabu would die. I knew that I would be here in Vancouver and I would not be able to say the last good bye in person, and I thought I came to terms with the possibility. But I was not fine and I have had a difficult time coming to terms with her death. I do not regret the decisions I have made to pursue my life in Canada, but I did not realize how significant the impact that death rituals could have on my grief journey. People and many traditions have incorporated death rituals into our lives because its rituals have roles to play in grieving individuals, as well as relationships between the deceased and alive (Bonanno, 2009). A few of my relatives have died since I moved to Vancouver, and I visited Japan when my other grandmother died a few years ago. But the death of Rabu was my first time I did not attend or participate in any death rituals for someone significant to me. I felt I was an outsider and an observer seeing my grieving family over Skype. The gestures to pay respect to the dead were happening in front of me, but I was physically and emotionally not there. I was aware that Rabu was dead but the whole thing – even her death – was conveyed via technology. When I

finally visited my family in Japan a few months after she died, there was only her remains to be seen. If I had been involved in any parts of the rituals or its gestures, I might have had an easier time after her death, and perhaps I would have felt like less of an outsider. Comparing my two different encounters with death and grief, I feel that death related rituals have provided me with some degree of comfort by engaging in the cultural traditions surrounding death and grief. Of course death rituals could also have been practiced outside of my cultural familiarity, such as offering an incense; nevertheless, I would have felt more at ease if I had been physically there in the cultural context and practicing the rituals alongside those who were similarly affected.

Rituals also can take the form of continuing bonds with a deceased; rituals can be private and public. Continuing bonds can be explained as a reestablishment and on-going relationship one creates with a deceased by finding ways to stay connected and to keep the memory of the dead (Schultz & Harris, 2011; Worden & Winokuer, 2011). Grieving individuals can practice and engage in having a continuing bond through sharing memories and stories of the deceased with others or personalizing an object which the dead once owned (Lewis & Hoy, 2011; Shear et al., 2011). Perhaps, a Japanese Buddhist custom allows those still living to have continuing bonds with the deceased and our ancestors through our traditions and customs. There is a family reunion holiday called *Obon* in summer. An immediate family and sometimes relatives too get together to honour our ancestors because many Japanese people understand and believe that we would not be here today without our ancestors. There is also a family gathering called *Houji*, which is held for a death anniversary at certain years after the death of a family member. In addition to those customs, some people occasionally visit the grave of the family such as on the anniversary day of their passing. I always visit both of my grandparents' graves at least to pay my respect and gratitude – and my great-grandmother's and the first dog of my mother's – when

I am in Japan; unlike Canadian custom, there is a family grave in which ashes of a family member is buried in a same spot. In his book, Bonanno (2009) says: “by following accepted ritual routines ordinary citizens participate in the process of cultural unification” (p. 191). These Japanese rituals help me to have continuing bonds with the dead.

Feeling Like a Failure

What a path it has been. It has taken me a whole two years to actually sit down and put my grief journey into this paper. I registered myself into the thesis course in 2015 but I was not able to finish it on-time even though I had written some of the chapters presented in this thesis. After exploring the kind of thesis I wanted to write, I thought I was ready to put myself to the task of writing an autoethnography about my grief journey. But clearly I was not ready at all, and there have been bumps along the way. I have felt pressure to produce something, somehow, by each deadline. I was able to write the drafts for three chapters, but after that, I completely lost the interest and motivation to create anything further. Time went by without any progress, regardless of how much I knew I had to finish what was started, and no matter how hard I told myself to “*just sit and write*”. I have felt growing frustration with myself, thinking, “*Why I can’t write anything? What is wrong with me? Everyone is done; I am such a failure.*”

I feel ashamed that I had to re-register in this thesis course in order to complete writing the project I started back in 2015. At the beginning of my thesis journey, I thought I was ready to share my experience and put it down on paper, but I was not. I have debated with myself whether to just write whatever I could before the due dates, or to accept the fact that I need more time. Although I tried to convince myself that I could push through this, a part of me has needed more time, something I have denied for fear of feeling like a loser. I realized that I have also been hard

on myself, comparing myself with others – “*I have been in Canada for 10 years and should be able to write a master’s level paper easily; why can I not write like the others do?*”

Surrendering and Accepting The Process: Going with The Flow

I had been seeing only one side of the coin – writing chapters and completing this thesis. Yet, this thesis is about sharing my story of grief over the death of those who are very important to me. Like any other grief, I have not had any control over how it has affected all the aspects of my being – mentally, emotionally, and physically. Perhaps, because as human beings, we have “the desire to *know* things” (Romanyshyn, 1999, p. 44), I have felt lost as I did not know where the grief was taking me or when the waves would hit me. I can ‘control’ whether or not to express certain emotion (such as anger or sadness) in certain situations, especially if expressing an emotion might be inappropriate. However, I have not had any control over when the waves of grief hit me, and I was flooded with emotions sporadically. The waves of grief come and go as they please and whenever they want to stir things up.

When Rabu and my grandmother died, I immersed myself in school. There were assignments and presentations to do, and I did not give myself time to feel anything. Looking back, I was something of a robot, doing tasks after tasks. I was going *around* my grief rather than going *through* it and processing it. That seemed to work well for some time. But once I had completed all the required coursework, the floodgates of grief were opened as though it were saying to me, “Hello Yoshiko, you haven’t forgotten about me, have you?”. Because I had put grief aside and had not processed it as it takes its own course, I was hit by waves of it. The waves were huge and hard in the beginning; I felt like I was lost in them – overwhelming emotions and feelings. I fought against the waves, gasping for air. I fought to come out of the waves because I felt uncomfortable with all the emotions, and I struggled for quite some time. But once I

surrendered to the grief and accepted its flow, things became easier. I allowed myself to ride the waves instead of fighting them. I allowed emotions and thoughts to express themselves – whether anger, sadness, or simply missing the ones I have lost. I have truly come to accept that grief comes and goes, and although I sometimes feel like crying, the feeling will pass; everything is impermanence – annica – so the Buddha says.

There is no “right” or “wrong” way to grieve. Some people may think that the grieving individual should cry and feel sad all the time. In reality though, there are as many unique ways to experience and process grief as there are unique people and minds, along with unique relationships with the deceased. Even within an individual, grieving can happen differently depending on who is being mourned. My experience of grief over Rabu has been different from that over my grandmother in intensity, feelings, and emotions. And I needed to learn to accept these differences. I miss Rabu more than I do my grandmother, but that is fine and nothing wrong with that. Sometimes I feel like crying out all of a sudden because I miss them, but that is the way grief is. Surrendering and going with the flow of grief has not been easy for me, but this experience was possible because I surrendered to where I was with my grief and prolonged my thesis journey, instead of fighting the process. My life has gone on without Rabu and my grandmother, but I carry their presence in my heart and in my memories.

Chapter 5 – Discussion: Riding the Waves

Summary of What I have Written So Far

I have written this thesis with the purpose of sharing my personal experiences of two losses within a specific cross-cultural context. I experienced a human loss and an animal loss within a short time in 2014, and have grieved each in completely different ways. In this chapter, I will draw themes and similarities between my grief experience and the existing researches, including discussion of the limitations of this thesis. In addition, the implications of my findings and suggestions to fellow counsellors are also provided.

Sharing and putting my grief processes into words has been not as easy as I anticipated it might be – I was thrown into the stormy ocean of grief, where the waves were taking me further and further away; to somewhere unfamiliar to me. When my dog Rabu and my grandmother died, I did not allow the waves of grief to wash over me. I missed them, especially Rabu, but I was able to ‘manage’ and carry out my life at the beginning of my journey. But when I was done with my courses for school and it came time for writing this study, I felt overcome with grief. I struggled to make deadlines, but the waves of grief kept hitting me harder and harder until I lost the energy and motivation to even try. Like waves of the ocean, grief has its own rhythm and speed; we cannot rush through it or fight it off. Rather, I had to learn how to ride the waves. My standing was unstable at the beginning but after accepting the natural course of grief, I am now able to ride those grieving waves, even though sometimes I still lose my balance.

Human – animal bond; beyond words. I had an incredible bond with my dog Rabu, which is not exceptional. Pets offer comfort, connection, and support (Doherty & Feeney, 2004; Sable, 2013; Toray, 2004). Forming a strong emotional bond with animal companions seems natural among pet owners. Pet owners and their companion animals engage in physical contact

and intimacy such as cuddling, body contact, and mutual gazing, which results in emotional bonding (Kurdek, 2008). A recent study conducted by Nagasawa et al. (2015) revealed that mutual gazing between pet owners and their dogs increases the amount of oxytocin present in the urine of the owners. Oxytocin is a hormone that plays an important role in intimacy, and its production is significantly increased during childbirth and breast-feeding, as well as during sex (MacGill, 2014). Nagasawa et al. (2015) also found that when dogs have limited interactions with their owners, the amount of oxytocin content in the dogs' urine decreased. Field, Orsini, Gavish, and Packman (2009) mention that pets induce "similar known patterns of emotion and behavior observed within human attachment relationships" (p. 335), and are known to take on the role of another human being for their owners. Because of the incredible bond a pet owner can have with a pet companion, the interspecies relationship may supplement relationships with other people in difficult times if one is lacking a close relationship with another human being (Field et al., 2009; Kurdek, 2009; Sable, 2013). Sable (2013) further states that the relationship with an animal companion can offer security and comfort, reduce pet owners' stress, and restore emotional balance in their lives. Kurdek (2009) found that out of 975 participants, on average, these participants tended to depend on their dogs more than their family members in times of emotional distress; perhaps because of the non-judgmental attitude and unconditional positive regard pets provide (Field et al., 2009; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006; Kurdek, 2008; Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014). Rujoiu and Rujoiu (2014) additionally mention that pets offer "unconditional acceptance, confidentiality, and absence of judgment and labeling" (p. 478), similar in effect to counselling.

Death of animal companions. Although I had prepared myself for Rabu's death before she died, her actual death hit me really hard. The emotions brought by the death of one's pet are

seemingly similar to the feelings one may experience upon the death of a human being (Field et al., 2009; Plancho, Templer, Stokes, & Keller, 2002; Sable, 2013; Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). Although several studies support and validate my experience of grief over Rabu, what seems significant to my particular experience was that there seems to be a lack of social and cultural understanding regarding pet loss.

Importance of death rituals and a continuing bond after death. I was fortunate to be able to participate in the funeral of my grandmother; through this, I have learned how important a death ritual can be in the grieving process. Winokuer and Harris (2012) explain that a ritual “usually involves an action that is initiated on that part of the bereaved individual to grieve a symbolic expression to certain feelings or thought” (p. 175), such as offering an incense or flowers. It may perhaps give grieving individuals some expectation of what is to come next – a memorial service, for example – so that they can go through the initial shock of the death and grief perhaps more smoothly. A death ritual can be described as a ceremony and/or action, which acknowledges the death of the deceased (Reeves, 2011; Winokuer & Harris, 2012). Death rituals such as wakes and funerals have an important part to play in the grieving process; however, Vale-Taylor (as cited in Lewis & Hoy, 2011) suggests that people may want to avoid making generalized assumptions about whether individuals’ needs are met with those rituals, because after all, we all grieve and react to death differently. There are culturally-, socially-, and religiously-set rituals, which grieving individuals are expected to practice, yet these may not necessarily meet the needs of all individuals. Some people live in a context in which cross-cultural, cross-religious, or cross-societal experience exists, and some of them may live in those contexts fluidly. Those people should not need to choose one or another in a given situation, especially when they are going through grief; the most important thing is to find a source of

comfort in difficult times. Therefore, rather than seeking ‘one size fits all’ kinds of rituals, each grieving individual may want to engage in the cultural, societal, or religious rituals that they may feel fit best for their particular loss experience.

Rituals could develop into forming a continuing bond with the deceased; Carmack and Packman (2011) suggest that memorials represent a continuing bond with the dead. Engaging in rituals could also help maintain a relationship – a continuing bond – with the dead. Winokuer and Harris (2012) describe a continuing bond as a continued relationship between a grieving individual and the dead that is meaningful to the griever. Field and Wogrin (2011) further stated that a continuing bond is about “transforming the inner relationship” (p. 38) with the dead. Bonanno (2009) notes that many non-western cultures have their “community bereavement rituals” (p. 164), including the Hmong people of Laos, Southeast Asian, Hopi Indians, Saramaka of Surinam, the people in Taiwan, and the people in China. Rituals and a continuing bond with the deceased human or animal can take many forms and shapes; sharing memories and keeping them alive, pictures, feeling their presence, and talking to them to name a few. In addition to that, a continuing bond can also have aspects of cultural, societal, or religious contexts. For example, Japanese death rituals are strongly influenced by Buddhism, and family, and relatives gather to commemorate the dead at set intervals after the death: at two, six, 12, 16, 22, 24, 26, 32, 36, 42, 46, 49, and every fifty years after that (nenki, n. d.). These anniversary gatherings allow people to reconnect and talk about the dead among each other. Many people might have learned through media and other sources, that griever eventually need to ‘find a closure’ and ‘move on’ with their lives without the dead – this idea might perhaps be more common in western cultures than Japan and other non Western cultures. Nonetheless, there is no need for griever to move on; instead, people can create new relationships with the deceased; whatever forms, shapes, and

actions may be involved. There is no need for grieving individuals to fill the part of their heart that was once for the dead; we can always keep that part for someone we have lost.

Limitations of Sharing My Story

This study presents three limitations that should be addressed. The concerns stem from the unique nature of autoethnography as to how its author presents her results and analysis through her own interpretation (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2008). Consequently, results of this study might be subjective rather than objective as the narrators (i.e., study participants) report their emotional experience (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011). Then there is the issue of reliability. Ellis et al. (2011) refer to reliability as the reliability/credibility of the narrators (study participants); and how true the narrators' accounts are. Ellis and Bochner (2000), along with Adams and Ellis (2011), also state that what truly happened and capturing the exact experience of it cannot be done as the narrative portrays and shares "the meaning [she] attached to the experience" (p. 751). Sharing my grief journey entailed accessing my memories, which at times were jumbled or otherwise inaccessible while writing this study. Additionally, the reliability of this study could be limited as I was 'only' sharing memories and meanings that I have 'attached to my experience'. As Bochner and Ellis (2000) expressed; "memory doesn't work in a linear way, nor does life" (p. 752), while Bonanno (2009) states that "the accuracy of our memories does not determine how we grieve; that is determined by what we do with our memories, how we experience them, and what we take from them during bereavement" (p. 71).

Similar to reliability, the validity of autoethnography is also open to criticism. Validity, within the context of autoethnography, refers to seeking truth (Adams & Ellis, 2011; Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Moreover, with validity, readers find the experience described "lifelike, believable, and possible" (Adams & Ellis, 2011, p. 207), and come to believe that what

is presented is true and authentic; what the author describes is something they can relate to in their own lives (Adams & Ellis, 2011; Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Ellis (as cited in Adams & Ellis, 2011) further states that autoethnography also “helps readers communicate with others different from themselves or if the text offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers, and the author’s own life” (p. 207). As my grief and my journey have been unique in its own way, some readers may not find within my story anything that moves them. They may not be able to relate or find some correlation between my story to their own lives. Moreover, because this study only focused on one type of grief – grief due to death from aging – , some readers may not find reading this study helpful for their own journey of grief.

A third criticism is generalizability, which questions the study’s result being applicable to, and “relevant for readers” (Adams & Ellis, 20011, p. 207), as well as to a larger population (Ellis et al., 2011). Sharing my grief process meant that the subject of this study (myself) is unique; thus, findings of this study (i.e., sharing my personal encounters and experience) involved “a limited number of cultures and institutions” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751) – mine were cross-cultural and cross-social experiences between Japan and Canada. There are various types of grief (such as anticipatory, complicated, chronic, or secondary grief) and different ways people die (suicide, homicide, accident, illness, and natural causes, to name a few). Grievers also grieve within various cultural, familial, and social systems. Hence this study and my story are limited and may not be applicable to lives of some readers. Some people may even be sceptical of the reliability, validity, and generalizability of autoethnography as this methodology is not so scientifically oriented. To put it simply, Ellis et al. (2011) express that autoethnographers’ views on social science differ from those of their counterparts, such as those who use ‘traditional’ research methods.

Implication to Counselling

Uniqueness of grief. Through reflecting, analyzing, and summarizing my experience of grief and its process, I have found a few key notes which may be applied to counselling. Since there is no right or wrong ways to grieve – grief is unique to each client –, the most important thing a counsellor can do is to create and provide a safe space for clients to grieve. Counsellors could inform grieving clients about grief; it is a natural part of living, and it may bring strong emotions that may be foreign and unfamiliar to them. Vlasto (2010) states that individual counselling brings the following benefits to clients: 1) safety, 2) development of rapport, 3) expression of intense emotions, and 4) working on blocks to their grieving process and accessing deeper issues. Some grieverers may feel confronted with their own mortality when they experience the death of others. Some could be forced to face up to past experiences which caused them grief or face unresolved issues because the recent death has re-ignited feelings they might have suppressed. Many issues could surface due to grief; thus, counsellors may want to be open-minded with whatever grieving clients might bring with them regardless of the initial reason why they have sought counselling (i.e., grief).

Pet loss. The grief experience of some pet owners can be as deep as those involving the death of another human being. Due to the lack of understanding of pet loss, the acknowledgement of pet loss and its significance can easily be downplayed and dismissed. Hence increasing awareness of the importance of this type of loss is needed. Counsellors could take helping roles in pet loss through direct involvement or indirect involvement by collaboratively working with animal healthcare workers (i.e., veterinarians and nurses) (Sharkin & Bahrck, 1990; Sharkin & Knox, 2003).

Just as with any other counselling, counsellors can offer an individual therapy to those experiencing pet loss. Here, counsellors might want to be aware of the lack of social understanding concerning pet loss and how that might impact some clients; I am more than certain that I am not the only one who has the feeling and thoughts of ‘no one, including a counsellor, would understand my grief because it is a pet loss’. Some authors (i.e., Clements, Benasutti, & Carmone, 2003; Wrobel & Dye, 2003; Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014; Sharkin & Bahrlick, 1990; Sharkin & Knox, 2003) emphasise that even while the number of people owning pets has increased, people’s understanding, support, and acknowledgement regarding pet loss is not as empathetic as it is upon the death of another human being. Some people might even think that expressing emotions after the death of their pets is shameful, and they may feel that they are not understood by others; hence, they may decide to withhold from expressing or sharing their experience with others, including a counsellor. Sharkin and Bahrlick (1990) also mention that some people are unaware of their grief after the death of a pet. Therefore, counsellors might encourage clients to explore their feelings and discuss their pet loss in order to help validate the clients’ experiences. In fact, Clements et al. (2003) state that validation and normalization of their grief experience from pet loss play an important part in establishing a therapeutic relationship and alliance with clients. Because many people tend to avoid talking about the loss of beloved pets or their grief – death in general – in the social settings, some grievors may feel that their grief experience is ‘abnormal’ or they might think that there is something wrong with them. To avoid this, counsellors can validate clients’ grief experiences and feelings by reframing them as a “natural and necessary” (Sharkin & Bahrlick, 1990, p. 307) part of grief (Clements et al., 2003; Sharkin & Bahrlick, 1990; Sharkin & Knox, 2003). By giving a client ‘permission’ to

grieve for their pet through validation, counsellors acknowledge their loss and pain, which might help clients greatly (Clements et al., 2003; Sharkin & Knox, 2003).

Sharkin and Knox (2003) further state that there is a lack of discussion about the role of an animal companion in the lives of clients in counselling. Counsellors often gain information about significant others (such as partners, family, and friends) through an intake session, but Sharkin and Knox (2003) pose a question regarding human-animal relationship: “how often do [counsellors] ask about pet ownership and attachment?” (p. 417). For some, especially those living alone and those who are older, a pet companion may have a significant meaning and role in their lives (Sharkin & Knox, 2003). By counsellors including a question about their relationships with their pet companions, clients may gain enough sense of safety that they can talk about these relationships during sessions, which could further encourage them to talk about their experience of grief after the death of their pets.

Counsellors and veterinarians together with other animal healthcare workers could work collaboratively; this is an example of the indirect involvement of counsellors. Counsellors, as a matter of fact, could work with those professionals in various capacities. First, counsellors can be a source of referral (Sharkin & Bahrlick, 1990; Sharkin & Knox, 2003). As many pet owners will inevitably experience pet loss, veterinarians might want to refer their patients/clients to counselling if they think the owners would benefit from it. Veterinarians may also want to refer pet owners who are faced to make a decision to euthanize their beloved pets (Sharkin & Bahrlick, 1990; Sharkin & Knox, 2003). Some pet owners are confronted with this decision when they see that their pet is in pain or suffering. Making the decision to ‘put a pet down’ can be very hard, even excruciating. Animal healthcare providers might not be able to provide the emotional support that these pet owners may need but a counsellor can assist them in “[sorting] through

their feelings while making such a critical decision” (Sharkin & Bahrck, 1990, p. 307); collaborative work between a counsellor and those care providers could allow this to happen smoothly. Through counselling, clients can explore the pros and cons of euthanizing their pet, and express the potential emotional hardship they might be feeling. Sharkin and Bahrck (1990) note that a counsellor could act as a mediator in this decision making process, in addition to being there to provide emotional support after putting the pet down.

At the same time, animal healthcare providers might be reluctant to refer the pet owners to a counsellor because they may be afraid of giving the wrong impression to the grieving pet owners (Sharkin & Knox, 2003) as pet loss and its grief may not be socially understood or acknowledged (Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014). As a result, some grieving pet owners may think that grief due to pet loss is not something that can allow themselves to feel. Here, counsellors may demonstrate and educate those care providers about the importance of validation and normalization of grief after the death of a pet. This kind of psychoeducation could increase the degree to which professionals refer pet owners to counselling as “additional support” (p. 419) during their time of difficulty (Sharkin and Knox, 2003).

Counsellors can additionally provide support to animal healthcare providers including veterinary students by, for example, facilitating workshops about pet loss and bereavement (Sharkin & Knox, 2003). They are often times the first responders when animals are sick and/or dying. Providing them with knowledge about pet loss and basic counselling skills (e.g., compassionate listening and empathy) can give those professionals relevant tools for approaching grieving pet owners (Sharkin & Knox, 2003). Moreover, psychoeducation could also focus on the importance of self-care and having coping skills for veterinary students and care providers facing strong (or unexpected, perhaps) emotional reactions after the death of

animals they care for (Sharkin & Knox, 2003). Animal healthcare workers may develop a unique and strong bond to animals under their care even though they are professionals (Sharkin & Knox, 2003); they may too experience grief over the death of those animals. If they are familiar with emotional reactions to pet loss, and with grief in general, they might be better equipped to meet the challenges of an animals' death.

Counsellors can also collaborate with animal healthcare providers through outreach programs. Despite a lack of social support in pet loss (Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014), counsellors can promote education on pet loss, the grieving process that accompanies it, and availability of social support (e.g., support groups) (Sharkin & Knox, 2003). Through community outreach programs, counsellors can organize pet loss support groups in collaboration with animal healthcare providers. If these forms of supports are available in a community, counsellors can provide the information to veterinarian hospitals so that the professionals there can refer the information to pet owners dealing with the death of their pets. Sharkin and Knox (2003) mention toll-free pet loss hotlines in the United States: PetFriends, Inc. (1-800-404-PETS) and Iowa State University (1-888-478-7574). Although there are a few counsellors offering services in pet loss within Vancouver, BC, Canada, searching "pet loss grief support group in Vancouver" on the internet generates no results. Therefore, outreach work may have potential for providing psychoeducation to the public about grief after the death of a pet and for providing support to those in need (Sharkin & Knox, 2003).

Grief as on-going process. Some people, including counsellors, may have heard or been told to move on and have closure after the death of someone close to them. However, the truth is, grief is an on-going process and there is no real end to grief. In fact, only some suffer lasting impacts of grief even though most people experience strong emotions throughout their grieving

process (Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2005). Grieving individuals will eventually feel less intense emotions and feelings, but they can often return, such as on the anniversary of the loved ones' death. In general, counsellors need to provide a safe space for clients to grieve and encourage them to process their grief in whatever manner they wish to. Walker (1996) suggests that counsellors ask clients to talk about their feelings, experiences, and the events surrounding the death, such as the funeral. As a result of talking about their feelings and experiences, clients might be able to increase self-understanding or reflection on their encounters (Walker, 1996). In addition, because accessing support entails clients sharing their experience of loss, they "have to confront their loss in order to talk about it" (Stroebe et al., 2005, p. 399). As much as it may be difficult for clients to share their experience of grief because of the fear of being judged or stirring up emotions, the acknowledgement and acceptance of the death of a loved one could be the first of many towards healing. Clients could seek bereavement counselling at any time – immediately after the death or years after that. Some clients whose loved one died recently might wish to be 'normal' as soon as they can; or some clients who seek counselling years after the death may be hesitant to talk about their grief because they have the imprinted idea of 'they should have moved on by now'. Here, counsellors can ensure clients that whatever they might be feeling is a part of their grief journey and grief is an on-going process.

Rituals and continuing bond in counselling. Nowatzki and Kalischuk (2009) suggest that counsellors may want to be open-minded about those things that cannot be seen or identified easily, such as faith in a higher power, spirituality, or even such thing as 'ghosts'. The authors studied the impact on grief and healing among 23 participants (18 females and five males, aged between 27-78) who experienced post-death encounters, which are auditory, visual, or otherwise vivid sense of the presence of the deceased, as well as vivid dreams experienced after the death

of someone. The study concluded that participants have found healing in such post-death encounters (Nowatzki & Kalischuk, 2009). Therefore, counsellors may want to acknowledge that some grievors may find comfort in experiencing post-death encounters. In other words, counsellors need to create a safe space for clients to talk about such experiences without fear of being pathologized; after all, some symptoms of some mental illness (e.g., Schizophrenia) include auditory or visual hallucination. Counsellors may even want to encourage their clients to share those stories by introducing the idea of making some rituals or developing a continuing bond with the dead, which can be healing to some grievors. Some grievors may not be aware of the concept of a continuing bond; then counsellors could introduce the notion to them with suggestions such as writing letters to the deceased, offering flowers, or visiting their resting place, for example. Counsellors can even hold a space (i.e., dedicating a session) for their clients to talk about the deceased on a day of the anniversary of their loved ones' death. There are so many ways to incorporate rituals and develop a continuing bond with the deceased into counselling sessions if clients choose to do so with their counsellors.

Cultural sensitivities and diversity. We – through our thoughts, beliefs, and values – are strongly shaped by the cultural and social structures in which we have been raised. Although it is true that cultures and societies can be easily identified based on factors such as geographic location, each family and household has its own values that may or may not be similar to the ‘mainstream’ values of their own culture and society.

Klass and Chow (2011), along with Neimeyer and Harris (2011) express their emphasis on cultural sensitivity and diversity in bereavement counselling. Neimeyer and Harris (2011) point out that the ways people grieve (e.g., expressing emotions) are impacted by different factors (e.g., culture, society, family structure, religious belief, and spirituality). In addition,

Klass and Chow (2011) mention how different cultures deal with death and grief. The word 'grief' does not even exist in some cultures and society (Klass & Chow, 2011). Furthermore, grieving individuals are often being policed with cultural, societal, and religious expectation of how people 'should' grieve (Klass & Chow, 2011; Neimeyer & Harris, 2011); but there is no written 'how to grieve' guidebook. Therefore, Klass and Chow (2011) suggest that counsellors need to be mindful of how each person expresses and places their emphasis on how they grieve and how they choose to grieve. Many counsellors have been taught to be culturally sensitive and diverse in our counselling practice. One might assume that others share similar beliefs and values just because they are from the same racial or ethnic background; but people do not necessarily operate in the same way, especially when it comes to grief. As such, counsellors must provide counselling that is sensitive to the client's individual needs rather than making assumptions based on their membership in a particular group they seem to belong to.

Final Thoughts

This journey has been filled with unexpected things. I have experienced not only how unique and different each grief experience can be, but also how significant, strong, and lasting the impact pet loss can have on a person. Unlike 'the social norm' of moving on, my journey of grief and healing just began not too long ago, and it will continue. Yes it is true that the grief waves have been much calmer in the past while, but I expect days when I would have a difficult time; but that is normal and a part of my process. I cannot fight against that; I just need to ride along.

I do not know how many times I wanted to give up on writing about this topic. I am also not sure how many times tears have streamed down my cheeks (and blowing my nose) while typing out these words. As I get closer to the end of writing about my grieving process, there is a

part of me that feels extreme sadness – does confronting the emotions of loss make Rabu even more distant from me now? Going through this process means that I am closing one chapter of my life and opening a new one. But does this mean that Rabu is in the past? No. I can always return to that chapter and read it over as many times I want. And I really hope that Rabu will be proud of me for sharing my memories of her and the things that her life taught me. She is not here with me today, nor will she be tomorrow – and no new golden retriever will replace her. But I will cherish my memories of her until the day I die. And when I cross that ‘rainbow bridge’, I will see her wagging her tail like crazy to say, “Yoshiko, what took you so long? I have been waiting for you!”

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Appendix

Institutional Review Board Certificate of Approval IRB ID# Nonaka_Cohen042116

Principal Investigator (if faculty research)
Student Researcher: Yoshiko Nonaka
Faculty Advisor: Avraham Cohen
Department: DASC/MC

Title: Experiencing grief and loss due to the death of loved ones as a temporary resident:
autoethnography

Approved on: April 21, 2016
Renewal Date: April 21, 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 Avraham Cohen and the student researcher Yoshiko Nonaka 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.

Brian Guthrie Ph D, RSW, Member of Clinical Registry

Chair IRB City University of Seattle

"Connect Early and Connect Often"

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