

**CREATING VOICE(S):
LOSING (MY) MOTHER AND
THE POETIC PROCESS OF GRIEF**

by

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Abstract

My mother died on January 1st, 1995, when I was 28 years old. Over the last nine years I discovered my voice through poetry, exploring my grief, wording my experience. The purpose of this study was to explore the process of my grief and my transformation over the nine years since her death. The following question guided my inquiry: How do the writing and the reading of poetry both reveal and transform the self with regards to the experience of mother-loss? I used a method of autoethnography - the study of the culture of the self - as a means of voicing my personal grief, documenting my poetic journey, and reflecting on the process of grief. Specifically, I used as a model the personal loss narratives of Carolyn Ellis (1993, 1995, 1997) and her technique of emotional introspection (1991a, 1991b, 1996, 1998). Five themes emerged from a thematic analysis of my poems: Questioning and A Search for Meaning, Holding On and Letting Go, Connection, Breath and Body, and Voice. Within these five themes I discovered the following findings: that grieving is an evolving, living process that does not seem to end; that relationships with deceased loved ones can and do change and grow over time; that grief is manifested viscerally; that inherent within grief and loss is the potential for the gift of transformation; and that this potential for transformation is deeply connected with discovering a voice within grief and expressing that voice to an audience. It is my hope that by sharing my own experience and voicing my own grief, my words will encourage the voice(s) of others in the silences which surround death. I invite the voice(s) of the reader, the audience (you) to respond, to interpret, to feel (my) words in your body, in the spirit of your own words.

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to my mother

to Derek

(absolute love)

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This is a poem of gratitude,
a thank you

To Judith Daniluk for her honesty,
her insight, her clarity,
for laughing without reserve,
for offering to me
both challenge and safety,
for taking a narrative risk

To Marla Arvay for her belief
in narrative process,
for her visceral response
to my poetry,
for creating room for me
in a schedule where there
was no room

To Carl Leggo, for inspiring
me years ago to create poetry,
for reading it today with
wonder and with an
open heart

To my family and to my
family of friends,
who gave me
time and space
to enter into this process
who offer me these beautiful
mirrors, who teach me
generosity of spirit,
who remind me
I am loved

Chapter One

Introduction

The Beginning

Not really the beginning, more of a midway,
a middle, a within.

This is where the questions are many,
the way is unknown, the
words unwritten.

I have been dreaming of poetry,
of research, of grief and of
transformation.

I begin to look at patterns of connection,
at patterns of my body
(jaw locked, neck
held stiff, teeth aching)
and I begin to consider change,
writing the change this moment.

I will read my poems;

I will write my responses, my questions,
my observations, my memories of what is
written and what is not.

I will walk these moments once more in order
to learn, in order to realize how much
I have (to learn)

I will have my own words (and you)
as companions.

January 1, 1995

my mother
died
(suddenly)
at the age of 55.

(she sat behind the wheel of her Tempo
in the driveway, motor running, exhaust
hanging in the cold air, her breath no
longer visible)

I was 28 years old (suddenly) and wholly
unprepared to lose

(my) mom
so early, so quickly.

Since that moment,
I have been aware

of this physical, emotional, mental, spiritual
journey
of grief and mourning.

Perhaps the most painful aspect
of this experience has been my
perception (mine) that

most people feel
uncomfortable discussing
death.

It seems that many people,
whether they know me

(intimately) or not,
find it difficult even to hear about
death.

For the most part, (until you,
until now)
I grieved

alone.

One of the inescapable truths of life is that we all will die. Despite this truth, in the dominant North American culture there is a silence that surrounds death (Davidman, 2000; Foote & Valentich, 1996; Kubler-Ross, 1969), an uncomfortable pause, an uncertainty, perhaps for some (me?), a refusal. I have become fascinated with this silence, with the inevitability of death and with the complexity of my own grief and mourning. I have also become aware of the need within myself to give a voice to the grief I experience, and the need within myself to present that voice to an audience. This is a paper of many voices, an exploration of voice. I celebrate both my poetic, creative voice and my academic, intellectual voice. I begin within these pages (and outside of these pages) to celebrate my emotional, intuitive, reflexive voice, the voice of my body and my spirit.

I am specifically interested in researching my own experience of sudden maternal loss and I seek to understand my growth and transformation as a young woman faced with the death of my mother. I am interested also in exploring the silences that surround death in North American culture, the journey to find a voice within this culture, and the human quest to express and share the ongoing grieving process of discovery and change and growth with other human beings.

Rationale

Only 1 in 10 children have lost a parent by the age of 25, and 5 in 10 children have lost a parent by the age of 54 (Umberson & Chen, 1994). It is unusual to lose either parent at a young age, and thus it is likely that if a daughter loses her mother earlier in life than expected, it is probable that she is also losing her first parent. A young adult woman in her twenties or early thirties is at a developmental time in her life where she has likely

left home fairly recently and is developing a career and a home of her own (Edelman, 1994). She is striving to be separate, to be independent and is still developing a sense of personal identity (Myers, 1986; Rando, 1988). This transition takes time: "You don't simply cross a line into adulthood, leaving all your childhood experiences behind once and for all" (Myers, p. 33). Jackson (1995) writes of "the imperative sense of that arduous journey away from home without which no one ever proves his worth or comes into his own" (p. 92). This journey is reliant on the existence of a home, a place from which we depart. Central to the concept of the mother-daughter relationship is this connection between motherhood and a sense of home. For many women, mother is "the friend who knows her best, her primary role model, often her main nurturer, her historian, ... her sense of 'home' [and] the most intense and most formative bond she may ever have with another woman" (Foote & Valentich, 1996, p. 154). Mother is inextricably linked with this concept of home and, ultimately, with each woman's own concept of self: "Until a strong line of love, confirmation, and example stretches from mother to daughter, from woman to woman across the generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness" (Rich, 1986, p. 246).

Although young women begin their own journey as they leave home, this is also the time in a woman's life where she is given the opportunity to "reunite with her mother in a woman-to-woman" relationship (Edelman, 1994, p. 57). Just when many women are beginning to see the qualities of a friend in their mother, and when they are venturing out on their own for the first time, the sense of home a woman often connects with her mother can be taken away (Edelman). Not only is the loss of a mother unexpected at this age, but often a mother and daughter are struggling during this time with the tension of

transition as they change from a parent-child relationship to an adult-adult relationship (Dietrich, McWilliam, Ralyea, & Schweitzer, 1999). The base of a young woman's own identity has not had time to become as secure as it may be for an older daughter, who has had the opportunity to deepen and develop her relationship both with her mother and with herself - the young woman is often more vulnerable and more lost (Foote & Valentich, 1998). The loss of a mother seems cruel at any time, but during early adulthood, the loss is definitely off-time, surprising, disruptive and bewildering (Myers, 1986). It is a triple loss: the loss of a parent, the loss of a sex-role model and the loss of a potential friend (Myers).

Young adult women are at a critical stage in their life cycle development, facing such developmental tasks as career development, intimacy, family and motherhood issues, revision of life goals and formulation of future goals (Satlow, 2002). Satlow's research with 11 young adult women who were 20 to 34 years old at the time of their mothers' deaths reveals that the loss of a mother during this stage has a profound and significant impact on the developmental tasks of young adulthood. When a woman is this young, it is difficult both to understand her mother's life in all of its complexity and to use this understanding for her own personal growth (Foote & Valentich, 1998).

Despite the profound impact of mother-loss on daughters (Edelman, 1994; Davidman, 2000) and the critical importance of young adult development (Satlow, 2002), there is a gap in the research with regards to the process of transformation of self for young adult women who have lost their mothers. The particular experience of young adult women losing their mothers to death has been studied very recently (Satlow) with a specific focus on the impact of mother-loss on developmental tasks. Satlow argues that

this gap or "neglect" is "because the experience of maternal death is viewed as neither formative nor normative during a daughter's young adulthood years" (p. 60). Both research and anecdotal literature (eg. Edelman, 1994, 1995; Pill & Zabin, 1997; Rando, 1988; Sigman & Wilson, 1998) have primarily focussed on the formative experience of mother-loss in childhood in order to gain an understanding of the "interaction between early maternal bereavement and later adult functioning" (Satlow, p. 60). Although both research and literature have documented the formative experiences of children who lose a parent, "most of the writings on parent loss still treat both parents and children as homogeneous groups and overlook the specific gender issues that arise when a same-sex parent dies" (Edelman, 1994, p. xxiv). Edelman suggests that the particular experience of women who have lost their mothers is "a phenomenon in dire need of further attention and research" (p. xxv).

Researchers (e.g. Foote & Valentich, 1996; Klapper, Moss, Moss, & Rubinstein, 1994; Kranz & Daniluk, 2002; Robbins, 1990) have also begun to recognize and to explore the profound impact of the "normative" experience of mother-loss for midlife daughters and it is becoming clear that the experience of loss at different developmental stages is an important area of research. In fact, based on their in-depth qualitative interviews with mid-life women who had lost their mothers in recent years, Kranz and Daniluk (2002) suggest that "the death of one's mother and loss of this significant relationship will likely be a powerful and formative experience for a woman, irrespective of the life stage she is in when it occurs" (p. 2). In light of Kranz and Daniluk's assertion that mother-loss is a significant life event at all stages of development, and Satlow's (2002) assertion that young adult women are proceeding through a particularly critical

life stage, it seems necessary and appropriate to continue to inquire into the depths of meaning within the experience of young adult maternal loss.

In spite of a thorough review of the literature, I have found a gap in research that focuses on young adult women who have lost their mothers to sudden death and the experience of transformation for these women over time. Research has, however, been conducted on the experience of grief for women at different developmental stages (Dietrich et al., 1999). This research supports the idea that grief is not a single reality or a clearly delineated process. Dietrich et al. stress the importance of sharing and listening to women's stories of mother-loss in order to begin to understand the subtle meaning and the lived experience of loss for individual women. Foote and Valentich (1996) write about their own experiences with mother-loss and assert that researchers need to learn "about various types of death and about the different responses to them from those who are left to mourn" (p. 147).

Creating Voice(s)

(every poem breaks a silence that had to be overcome)
(Adrienne Rich, 1995, p. 84)

North American culture is a culture of individualism, achievement and control, a "culture that does not encourage the open communication of feelings of loss and mourning" (Foote & Valentich, 1996, p. 146). Foote and Valentich document the strength and power of witnessing grief through the healing power of voice. The research literature (e.g. Davidman, 2000; Foote & Valentich; Kubler-Ross, 1975) also stresses how imperative it is that we break the silences surrounding death. In fact, based on the stories and letters of hundreds of women whose lives were touched and changed by the

loss of their mothers, Edelman (1994) believes it is essential that we talk about this critical and formative loss in order to heal.

I found a voice to express my grief over the sudden loss of my mother in the form of poetry. For the past nine years, I have actively explored the vast country of my grief through words and through my body, writing, as Bolton (1999) suggests, with trust and faith:

Therapeutic writing asks ... writer[s] to trust their bod[ies], through their writing hand[s], not only to tell them vital things about themselves, but also to offer routes to connecting up and making whole ... [It] is an act of faith in the self. (p. 121)

Because poetry is "intuitive and unreasoned," it has "expressive and personally explorative power" (Bolton, p. 119). I believe in the gift of word and voice, and the power of sharing experience with others, the power of connection. Story and words and voice can move one "beyond cultural and institutional silences ... [and] one not only tells the story but reshapes and reconfigures one's sense of self in the process" (Davidman, 2000, p. 256).

Lowinsky (1992) defines self as the "inborn potentiality for an authentic and vital identity," but she also acknowledges a Jungian expansion of this definition to include "the psychological, biological, and spiritual aspects of being human" (xiii). Through words, this potential self may be accessible. It is possible, through poetry, to write the experiences of grief, to live the possibilities of self, and to witness the cycles of emotion, confusion, clarity, transformation, questions, and crises that do not seem to end, but rather shift and change. It is possible, through poetry, to become whole:

In writing poetry we take our holistic spiritual, psychological, and physical well-being into our own hands and hearts ... it is a way of grasping life, nurturing every bit of good, connecting up severed bits of ourselves; it is written from our whole self - mind, spirit and body (Bolton, p. 130).

Thus, poetry is a vehicle through which we may be able to connect with ourselves, and perhaps with much more; it "is above all a concentration of the power of language which is the power of our ultimate relationship to everything in the universe" (DeShazer, as cited in Richardson, 2000a, p. 933). For me, poetry represents the potential to connect inward, but it also represents the potential to reach outside of my self, to connect with others and, perhaps, to the mother I have lost. Poetry, for me, is much more than words - it is a vehicle for the expression of my grief, and it is the opportunity to continue my relationship with my mother, to continue to know her, to discover her within myself.

Exploration and Connection - Purpose of the Study

Better to admit what all of us really know:
we're just mucking around looking for truth.
(Bochner, Ellis, & Tillmann-Healy, 1998, p. 59)

Within these pages, I study this process of exploration and connection, this journey of the body and the spirit and the heart. I am a woman who, as a young adult, suddenly and unexpectedly lost my mother, and I have investigated my own development and transformation in response to this significant loss with the following question: How do the writing and the reading of poetry both reveal and transform the self with regards to the experience of mother-loss? There is a gap in the research when it comes to an exploration of the ebb and flow of grief over time and when it comes to the particular experience of the process of grief and transformation for a woman who has lost her

mother. There is also a gap in research that explores the process of grief and transformation through the vehicles of narrative and poetry. Within these pages, I make poetic inquiry into the transformation of my relationship with grief, my relationship with my mother, and my relationship with self. Within my poetry, I have articulated the grief of mother-loss as a multi-layered experience of personal transformation over time, a journey that encompasses the pain of loss and the inherent potential which exists within loss.

My words and my poetry are the heart of my research. It is my hope that these words will illustrate, inform and teach. It is my hope that these words will continue to transform my experience of grief in the past, in the present, and in the future. These words are the voice(s) of my heart and spirit and body and mind and they have been the guide for my inquiry. I have written and read this poetry, I have narrated this process of writing and reading, and I have witnessed that poetry and narrative are both "the process and the product" (Polkinghorne, 1988) of (my) research. Both my question and my poetry informed my decision to use a method of autoethnography – the study of the culture of the self - a study of my own journey through grief and loss, a study of the healing power of my own voice in the poetry I have created over the last nine years and in the poetry and prose I continue to create. This narrative method complements the intuitive, evocative, visceral nature of my writing and the sensitive nature of my topic. I invite the voice(s) of the reader, of the audience (you), to respond, to interpret, to feel my words in the body, in the spirit, and to transform these words into meaning(s) of value to your own heart, mind, body and spirit.

Chapter Two

*Literature Review**Introduction*

As I investigated and explored the literature of grief and loss and the research and literature around mother-loss in particular, it became apparent to me that I wanted to begin this chapter with the current research on the relationship between mothers and daughters before I could begin to explore the complexity inherent in the loss of such a relationship. Therefore, within this chapter, I provide a brief introduction of the strength, power, complexity and diversity of mother-daughter relationships. I then make inquiry into the impact of mother-loss on these relationships. The social context of grieving is also an aspect of the grief and loss research which connects closely to my purpose of discovering a voice around and through mother-loss. Only after I had made all of these inquiries did I begin to explore the literature around the general process of grief and the factors which influence this process - the mediators of mourning. I discuss the stage theory of grief and compare it to the more recent theories of grieving as a series of cycles or phases or tasks. I then move from a more general exploration of the process of grief into the specific studies around mother-loss that inform my own research. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the potential for growth inherent within the grieving process, growth which allows for the possibility of reconnection both with self and with mother.

The Mother-Daughter Relationship

We have ways within each other
that will never be said by anyone
(Rumi, 1995, p. 37)

In North American society, mother is more than just parent. The concept of

mother has taken on archetypal weight and significance within the mythology of our culture. Carl Jung (1982) suggests, in fact, that our unconscious mind has a "memory" of mother-love that is all-encompassing:

Mother-love ... is one of the most moving and unforgettable memories of our lives, the mysterious root of all growth and change, the love that means homecoming, shelter, and the long silence from which everything begins and in which everything was. (p.121)

If, as Jung suggests, our memories hold this idealized vision of mother-love, it is not surprising that the mother-daughter relationship is likely to be of critical importance to any understanding of a young woman's psychological and spiritual growth, since "the woman who raised us resides deep within our psyches, shaping our understanding and expectations of ourselves as women" (Kranz & Daniluk, 2002, p. 2). As a direct result of this ideal faith in mother-love comes the belief that "mothers are immortal. Mothers don't die" (Edelman, 1994, p. xxi). The ideal mother thus becomes the symbol of comfort and security, the "primal bond" (Edelman, p. xxiii).

Jung (as cited in Lowinsky, 1992) proposes that "every mother contains her daughter in herself and every daughter her mother, ... every woman extends backwards into her mother and forwards into her daughter ... [and] the conscious experience of these ties produces the feeling that her life is spread out over generations" (p. 6). Jung further proposes that women are inextricably linked with their own mothers and with the ideal of motherhood. Similarly, Lowinsky writes that the "path to wholeness ... requires that a woman make a journey to find her roots" (p. xi). According to Lowinsky, this is an imperative journey to connect with stories of the archetypal "Motherline", the collective

wisdom of women, a necessary journey for women who wish to understand their own stories: "Mother is the first world we know, the source of our lives and our stories ... yet the voice of her experience is seldom heard in our literature" (p. xi). Lowinsky recognizes the power of our mothers' voices, of the voices that connect generations. Yet, she also recognizes the entanglements of ideal expectations in a culture where "we are so full of judgments about what mother ought to be that we can barely see what mother is" (p. xi).

Nancy Friday (1978) has explored the complexities of the mother-daughter relationship and the struggle women have disentangling the ideal from the real. She concludes that "grown women ... are still looking for, still tied to the illusion of the all-loving, good mother" (p. 8). Lynn Davidman (2000) suggests that a lost mother cannot be replaced in a family and "one of the key reasons ... is that there is a ... confusion as to who is missed – the ideal mother or the real one" (p. 33). Davidman discovered in her interviews with sixty women and men participants whose mothers had died when they were between the ages of 10 and 15 that "nearly all respondents felt that no matter what, ... despite diligent searching for someone to give them the total care and devotion that they imagined their mothers would have provided, maternal love and nurturing were still expressed as irreplaceable" (p. 245). When daughters lose their mothers, it appears that many lose what they perceive as the "cultural ideal of ... unconditional love" (Davidman, p. 34).

Nancy Chodorow (1978) has explored the mother-daughter relationship in light of the fact that in most Western families, mother is the primary caregiver of both daughters and sons. She proposes that "mothers of daughters tend not to experience... infant

daughters as separate from them in the same way ... as infant sons" (p. 109). She notes that as a result of this identification, daughters are "preoccupied with those very relational issues that go into mothering" (p. 110). Daughters experience a "lack of separateness" from their mothers and also experience "ego and body-ego boundary issues" (p. 110). Daughters become more flexible than do sons in their sense of both psychological and physical separateness from the world around them. Mothering itself is thus reproduced in that a daughter develops her sense of identity in relation to a woman, her mother:

"Because women are themselves mothered by women, they grow up with the relational capacities and needs, and psychological definition of self-in-relationship, which commits them to mothering" (p. 208). Chodorow argues that it is the organization of the family roles that perpetuates gender inequality and the existing division of labour within families. Chodorow suggests the need for a fundamental reorganization of the sexual division of labour in families and the social organization of parenting. She particularly stresses the potential impact of shared parenting on the mother-daughter relationship, which she suggests is characterized by "dependence and merging" (p. 121). According to Chodorow, without this reorganization, daughters will continue to experience their love for their mothers as containing both "a threat to selfhood and a promise of primal unity" (p. 194).

Adrienne Rich's (1986) feminist approach to the mother-daughter relationship presents a shift in focus to the "essential" nature of the experience of mothering even as it exists as an institution in the patriarchy. She argues that the archetype of mother is a dangerous concept in that women become idealized and exploited as a result. Rich examines the ambiguity that exists in the relationship between mothers and daughters:

"Most of us know both love and disappointment, power and tenderness in the person of a woman" (p. 11). Rich uses her own experiences as a woman, as a daughter, and as a mother to explore the "painful, incomprehensible, ambiguous" (p. 15) experience of motherhood. She expresses her belief that "only the willingness to share private and sometimes painful experience can enable women to create a collective description of the world which will be truly ours" (p. 16).

Rich (1986) proposes that it is the institution of motherhood created by the patriarchy that creates a breach between mothers and daughters and between all women. Rich acknowledges that "to accept and integrate and strengthen both the mother and the daughter in ourselves is no easy matter because patriarchal attitudes have encouraged us to split, to polarize, these images" (p. 253). Rich suggests that within the social and cultural institution of motherhood "women are made taboo to women ... In breaking this taboo, we are reuniting with our mothers; in reuniting with our mothers, we are breaking this taboo" (p. 255). Rich asserts that "the most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities" (p. 246).

Rich also explores the potential power within women's bodies. She expresses her own personal desire to "heal ... the separation between mind and body" (p. 40) and to embrace all aspects of the female self. She emphasizes that this healing represents for women the opportunity and the "possibility of converting our physicality into both knowledge and power" (p. 284). When women regain control over their bodies, Rich concludes that they will be embracing powerful aspects of self and developing a sense of agency as a woman: "A woman who has respect and affection for her own body ... will wordlessly transmit to her daughter that a woman's body is a good and healthy place to

live" (p. 245). Rich adds that mothers and daughters are connected through an "essential" bond and with "a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies" (p. 220). Rich asserts that it is through the courage of mothers that daughters learn to love themselves and discover their own personal sense of power within their female bodies.

Walters (1992) agrees with Rich (1986) that the relationship between mothers and daughters can be "rediscovered and rejuvenated to empower both women" (p. 146). She argues, however, that there is a danger in conceptualizing this relationship as "essential", and she suggests that this view is limited in that it places the blame for the breach between mothers and daughters on the patriarchy and depicts mothers as passive victims of the patriarchy. She notes also that Chodorow's arguments seem to depict women as agents of the patriarchy, "guilty by commission" (p. 161). Walters describes the mother-daughter relationship as a "mixing of love, responsibility, and (all too often) blame" (p. 1). She questions the dichotomy that the mother-daughter relationship is either a "transcendent bond...or...the 'bond' that keeps women tied to self-destructive behaviours and patterns of submission" (p. 161).

Walters (1992) purports that the mother-daughter relationship is complex, mired in "a world, a culture, a class, an ethnicity, a politics, in short, in history" (p. 164). As such, she argues that it is a trap to suggest that daughters and mothers "bond and separate, love and let go" (p. 163). She asserts that this is a relationship that is located in culture and that there is the "possibility of mother/daughter continuity that doesn't deny their autonomy, sexuality, or adulthood" (p. 228). She proposes that it is possible to witness both mothers and daughters as women "across all barriers" (p. 235) including the barrier

of generation that has threatened to separate. She concludes that as women in a particular relationship, mothers and daughters can take the risk to deconstruct the culturally constructed narrative and create a new narrative for women, a celebration of continuity and connection and intimacy and ambiguity.

Mother-loss: Reconnecting and Recreating Relationship

The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother
to the daughter is the essential female tragedy.
(Rich, 1995, p. 237)

Despite the human investment in the ideal mother, the mother who never dies, it is an "inescapable fact ... that our mother is going to leave us" (Viorst, 1986, p. 16). Edelman (1994) reports that "in 1992, nearly 90,000 American women died between the ages of 25 and 54 ... [and] at least 125,000 children, adolescents, and young adults are left motherless by death each year" (p. xxii). Based on her personal experience of mother-loss and the numerous stories of other women who have shared their stories of loss with her, Edelman asserts that when a mother dies, it is for many women, the "most determining, most profound, most influential event ... [a] nightmare, at once impossible to imagine and impossible to ignore" (p. xix, xxiii). Many women carry the certainty that they will never be loved in quite the same unconditional way, that they have lost the opportunity to prove themselves in some way, and that they have lost a connection to the past (Rando, 1988). Pill and Zabin (1997) write of the "legacy" left by the early and off-time loss of a mother. These authors suggest that a "woman's development is intimately bound to her relationship with her mother [and] when this is prematurely interrupted the normal transitions and decisions of life are more difficult" (p. 180).

There is a tendency for grieving women to idealize their mothers and to feel

ambivalence around the loss (Edelman, 1994). Kranz and Daniluk (2002), in a discussion of Robbins' (1990) concept of the "myth of mother/hood," conclude that the "the death of a mother presents an opportunity for daughters to rework their 'myth of mother/hood' and ... affords them a unique chance to recreate their pattern of interactions with themselves, their mothers, and the world around them in more meaningful and truthful ways" (p. 4). Women can begin to work on humanizing their mothers rather than romanticizing, gathering information about the realistic woman who lived (Edelman). It is important for a daughter to mourn not only her mother, but also the loss of her own ideals, hopes, dreams, wishes, fantasies, and the unfulfilled expectations, feelings and needs she has in connection with her mother and with their relationship (Rando, 1988).

The experience of the mother-daughter relationship and of mother-loss is shaped by memory and "those who attempt to construct narratives of mother-loss have the space for creative renderings of their experiences ... [which are] capable of giving new and varied expression to identity" (Davidman, 2000, p. 44). Essentially, the loss of a mother does not necessarily mean the loss of connection nor the loss of relationship. Rather it can carry the possibility of re-defining and exploring a new connection, a new relationship with both mother and with self. Pill and Zabin (1997) suggest that "feelings of loss and a longing for reconnection ... continue throughout life, even after the period of acute grief passes" (p. 181). For Edelman (1994), mourning definitely "includes maintaining a relationship - albeit a new relationship - with that [loved one]" (p. xiv). I have inquired into the past in order to explore the possibility of re-connecting with myself, with my audience, and with my mother. In this way, while searching through past experience, I have continued to be in relationship with my mother in the present, re-

connecting and re-creating through my research, through my memory, through my words, through my voice(s).

The Social Context of Mourning

But as for me, for you, the irresistible sea is to separate us,
As for an hour carrying us diverse, yet cannot carry us diverse forever
(Whitman, 1891, p. 88)

Human beings do not grieve in isolation. There is a social and cultural context to all experiences of grief. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969,1975) has been instrumental in beginning to break the silence which surrounds death in North American culture. For Kubler-Ross (1975), "death is the key to the door of life" (p. 164) and "dying is something we human beings do continuously, not just at the end of our physical lives here on earth" (p. 145). Death then is a transition, a change, a transformation and a willingness to "risk the unknown, to venture forth into unfamiliar territory [and to] undertake the search for [the] self" (Kubler-Ross, 1975, p. 145). Kubler-Ross (1969) connects the advancements in science to the fear and denial of death in western culture. Davidman (2000) agrees that the "silences surrounding death stem from social conditions particular to western societies" (p. 35). This is a culture which values control over both feelings and actions, and death is the "ultimate loss of control" (Davidman, p. 36).

Mourners are thus motivated to control their feelings as a result of confusing and contradictory social expectations (Klapper et al., 1994). Foote and Valentich (1996) also recognize in North American culture this "death anxiety and denial of death, ... a desensitization to and repression of grief" (p. 3). Davidman (2000) points out the paradox that "although our culture may, to some extent, teach us to honor the dead, we are clearly not supposed to discuss them in everyday conversations" (p. 40).

Klapper et al. (1994) studied the qualitative interviews of 107 daughters between the ages of 40 and 68 who had experienced their mothers' deaths and they suggest that the "cultural diversity and diffuse secularity of modern life may result in no clear or systematized rules about how to respond to loss" (p. 32). They define grief as "an intrapsychic and behavioural response to bereavement" (p. 30), and mourning as a complex process "involving the social and cultural prescriptions for the expression of grief" (p. 30). Thus, within a culture whose messages "disparage the depth and breadth of ... loss" (Valentich & Foote, 1998, p. 223), the personal experience of loss may differ from the cultural expectations of silent mourning.

Grief and mourning can be problematic if the personal experience of the loss differs from cultural ideas (Klapper et al., 1994). Often, mourners are given two social messages: express the grief, but not too much or for too long, and then get over it, put it behind, get back to normal and move on (Valentich & Foote, 1998). In light of the cultural expectation of silence and the mixed messages around grief and mourning, Foote and Valentich (1996) stress the importance of learning "how to witness one's grief within the life one goes on to lead" (p. 150). It is this concept of the witness, the potential voice within grief that provides bereaved women with the "opportunity to break long-held silences and speak their contradictions and inconsistencies" (Davidman, 2000, p. 258). Davidman suggests that it is the shared experiences of the individual that may help "others to understand and make meaning out of their own experiences" (p. 261). She writes of her own experiences grieving her own mother's death, and she proposes that her own "attempts to break silences and come to terms with emotional pain ... have indicated one pathway to understanding the experiences of others and of culture and loss" (p. 260).

Without connection to others and in the face of the apparent denial of death in our culture, grieving can become a lonely and potentially damaging experience. Kubler-Ross (1975) asserts that "it is the denial of death that is partially responsible for people living empty, purposeless lives" (p. 164). It is my hope that my own research might create for me and for others an openness, an honesty, a possible way to begin and to continue to process grief.

The Process of Grief

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you
(Whitman, 1891, p. 74)

Stage Theory of Grief

Grieving is a complex and an individual process which has inspired a number of theories and models that attempt to explore the nature of the human reaction to loss. Kubler-Ross (1969, 1975) is well-known for her influential model of the stages of grief. Out of her interviews with terminally ill patients, Kubler-Ross (1975) theorized six stages of grief associated with the process of dying, which quickly became generalized within the literature to become the stages associated with all forms of grieving and change. Her stages include denial, isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kubler-Ross, 1969). Her work has been instrumental in beginning to break the taboo in North American culture which surrounds death and the open discussion of death. However, her research centered on the grief of those who were actually experiencing the process of dying, and thus, her stages of grief may not generalize to the experiences of those who are left to grieve after loved ones die.

The Ebb and Flow of Grief - Mourning Mediators

Recent literature and research suggests, in fact, that a stage theory of grief generalized to all forms of grieving is limited and supports the fact that we cannot expect all people to grieve in the same manner (Edelman, 1994, 1995; Rando, 1988; Worden, 2002). Grief responses are personal and it is unlikely that all people have the same feelings and reactions to death. It is also unlikely that all people follow a certain set of stages as they grieve (Rando). Furthermore, as a result of stage theory thinking, there may be false expectations that grieving is time-limited (Rando). It seems that "grief changes; it ebbs and flows" (Rando, p. 75) over time as a result of physical and mental health, coping behaviours in response to stress and critical events, secondary losses, anniversaries, the characteristics and meaning of the lost relationship, the mode of death, previous losses, personality variables, and social support.

The body has its own wisdom and the physical effects of loss are often the reason that individuals are referred to therapy (Rando, 1988). In times of stress, the body is less resistant and more vulnerable to illness. Drugs and sedatives are sometimes used during the acute crisis of a loss because they keep the mourner from experiencing the pain of loss (Rando). The drugs will delay mourning and disrupt both appetite and sleep and can thus adversely affect the body (Myers, 1986). When we are experiencing loss, nutrition, rest, sleep, health and exercise become all-important (Rando).

Loss inspires within the mind and the body fear of subsequent losses (Edelman, 1995). For example, when women approach the "magic number," the age their own mother died, often it triggers grief, sadness, fear, and for some, a sense of wonder, a powerful urge to live a full life (Edelman, 1994). Many women fear that they are leaving

their mothers behind when they pass this age and it is important for them to have the reassurance that they can move forward without leaving their mothers behind (Edelman, 1994). Anniversaries and special dates are carried within the mind and body as well: "All of us have an unconscious time clock within us that keeps track of anniversary dates whether or not we consciously recognize it" (Rando, 1988, p. 77). These dates can trigger a "grief spasm," which is an "acute upsurge of grief which occurs suddenly and leaves you feeling out of control" (Rando, p. 44).

Since there are major differences in the ways that individuals respond to grief, Worden (2002) discusses some possible mediators of mourning which arose from his own clinical work and from the literature he reviewed. These mediators may suggest reasons why individuals handle mourning in different ways. Worden cites the relationship connection with the deceased as one important factor in understanding a mourner's response to death. It is important to note that the same mother can be perceived differently by different people, even different daughters within the same family. He also notes the importance of the nature of the attachment with the person who dies. This includes the strength of attachment, the security of the attachment, the ambivalence in the relationship, any conflicts with the deceased and the level of dependency in the relationship. Worden's third mediator is the mode of death; for example, whether the death was natural, accidental, suicidal or homicidal is another important consideration. This mediator also includes factors such as proximity at time of death, suddenness or expectedness of the death, any violence or trauma associated with the death, the possibility of multiple losses, the perception that the death may have been preventable, and whether or not the death is ambiguous or stigmatized. Worden's fourth

mediator involves historical antecedents, any previous losses and how they were grieved. He documents a fifth mediator of personality variables such as age and gender, coping style (active or passive), attachment style, cognitive style (optimistic or pessimistic), ego strength (self-esteem and self-efficacy), beliefs and values, which also play a role in how individuals respond to loss and how they live and how they express their grief. Social variables are a sixth mediator and include support availability, support satisfaction (perception of support), social role involvement, religious resources and ethnic expectations. Worden's final mediator is the existence of concurrent stresses or crises that arise following a death or at the same time. Thus, mourning mediators shape the grieving process for each individual, making it difficult to fit all grieving responses into a set of specific time-limited stages.

Grief Cycles, Phases, and Tasks

Edelman (1995) acknowledges that "we would all like to believe that mourning is magically contained within those first six months after a loss" (p. xiv). Her work with motherless women and her own mourning process have convinced her, however, that this is an unrealistic expectation and that there seems to be no beginning, middle or end to grief because "a daughter's mourning for a lost mother never completely stops" (p. xv). Furthermore, Edelman suggests that the process is "not linear. It's not predictable. It's anything but smooth and self-contained" (1994, p. 5). Edelman believes that grief occurs in cycles, that a woman does pass through the stages of grief, but that these "responses repeat and circle back on themselves as each new developmental task reawakens her need for the parent" (p. 5).

In his work on attachment between children and their mothers, Bowlby (as cited

in Littlewood, 1992) proposes that there are phases through which a mourner must pass in order to resolve grief. He believes that "a mother's absence provokes certain instinctive systems such as anxiety, protest and searching" (p. 65). He proposes three phases of mourning. Initially, anxiety evokes anger and weeping and an attempt to recover the lost object. Despair follows these failed attempts to recover the lost object, and during this phase behaviour becomes disorganized. The final phase involves a "reorganization of behaviour, partly connected with the lost object and partly in relation to new objects" (p. 66). Based on her clinical experience, Rando (1988) reinforces Bowlby's concept of phases. However, she proposes that responses to grief fall into the following three phases: avoidance, which includes shock, denial and disbelief; confrontation, which involves a charged emotional state and intense grief; and re-establishment, in which grief declines and there is an emotional and social re-entry into the world. Rando reinforces the theory that these grief responses are personal and this is not an orderly, unvarying process occurring within a specific time frame of reference.

Worden (2002) states that the idea of a mourner passing through phases implies passivity. Based on his own clinical work and an extensive review of the grief and bereavement literature, he presents as an alternative the concept of tasks, through which the mourner takes action and the mourning process can thus be influenced by the mourner. Mourners work through these tasks in different ways and thus it is impossible to set a definite end to the process. However, Worden suggests that there is a "sense in which mourning can be finished" (p. 47). Two benchmarks of "completed grief" may be the ability to think of the deceased without intense pain and the ability to reinvest emotions into life and living. He acknowledges also that "there is a sense in which

mourning is never finished" (p. 47). With this in mind, Worden proposes four tasks which mourners face in their grieving journey. Task one involves accepting the reality of the loss. Especially in the case of sudden death, many deny the loss and the meaning of the loss. Traditional rituals such as the funeral help with this task. Task two involves working through the pain of grief. This includes the literal physical pain, the emotional, and the behavioural pain of loss. Task three is adjusting to an environment in which the deceased is missing. There are three areas of adjustment: external adjustments, such as developing new skills and taking on new roles; internal adjustments, which include the fundamental concepts of self-definition and self-efficacy; and spiritual adjustments to one's sense of the world, a challenge of values and beliefs. Task four involves emotionally relocating the deceased and moving on with life by finding ways to memorialize, keeping the dead with us while going on with life.

As a result of her own experience with mother-loss and her communications with women who have experienced mother-loss, Edelman (1995) agrees that Worden's (2002) fourth task, to re-connect with our lost loved ones in an evolving relationship, is key to the process of mourning the loss of a mother. Klapper et al. (1994) agree with Worden that grieving is an "active process" with a potential for "meaningful choices" and "purposeful activity" (p. 31). Like both Worden and Edelman, Klapper et al. also conclude that the primary task for mourners is "to find a new place for the loved one inside themselves, so internalizing aspects of the deceased" (p. 41).

Complicated Mourning

Grieving is a complex process, and it is possible that the experience of grief may become complicated mourning. Based on her clinical experience, Rando (1988)

theorizes that "as long as ... mourning behaviour does not severely impair [the] ability to function (physically or psychologically) for too long, is not harmful to ... long-term adjustment, or does not represent more severe pathology, it can be viewed as not abnormal" (p. 76). The danger signs of problematic grieving include: (a) an inability to believe the parent has died, (b) protracted isolation, (c) an inability to care for the self, (d) a reliance on drugs or alcohol, (e) extensive plan changes, and (f) excessive weight loss or weight gain (Myers, 1986).

Complicated grieving can take the form of unresolved grief or a failure to mourn. Unresolved grief can be manifested in the following ways: (a) absent grief, (b) inhibited grief, (c) delayed grief, (d) conflicted grief, or (e) chronic grief (Rando, 1988). Failure to mourn can occur: (a) if the mourner has a fear of losing control or appearing weak, (b) if she cannot bear to recognize the loss, (c) if she has a fear of uncovering anger or guilt, (d) if she has a fear of resurrecting the pain of a past loss, (e) if she is too overwhelmed with simultaneous losses, or (f) if social support is unavailable (Rando, 1988). It has been established (Davidman, 2000; Edelman, 1994, 1995; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Rando, 1988) that silencing the expression of grief can result in complicated mourning. While there is no evidence to suggest that complicated grief is common for women particularly, given the significance of the mother-daughter relationship, the magnitude of the loss, and the cultural expectation to experience grief in a series of stages, phases or tasks and then move on, one can assume that it may be an issue for many woman. Thus, it is important that researchers and clinicians honour the complexity of the grief experience and investigate the individual experiences of women in order to understand each woman's grieving process.

Research on Mother-loss

I have lived on the lip
of insanity, wanting to know reasons,
knocking on a door. It opens.
I've been knocking from the inside
(Rumi, 1995, p. 281)

A number of research studies inform my own study by exploring the experience of mother-loss and the meaning women attach to this experience. According to Kranz and Daniluk (2002), grieving the loss of a mother is indeed a complex process. The purpose of Kranz and Daniluk's (2002) qualitative, phenomenological study of mid-life women who had recently experienced the loss of their mothers was "to explore how women in midlife experience and meaningfully construct the recent death of their mothers" (p. 1). The specific research question was: "What is the meaning and experience for midlife women of the recent death of their mothers?" (p. 4). This study is significant in that it explored mother-loss over time rather than with a focus on the months immediately following the death. It also focused on a particular developmental time period in response to "the relatively little attention" (Kranz & Daniluk, p. 2) in the literature paid to adult women's responses to the death of their mothers. The phenomenological approach used in this study also provided women in this study with the opportunity to voice their grief, to explore through words, with a witness and as a witness, the experience of the loss of their mother.

Kranz and Daniluk (2002) sought women who had a desire "to understand and explore the meaning of their experiences" (p. 5) and a willingness to discuss these experiences with an interviewer. The sample was composed of nine Caucasian, middle-class women between the ages of 42 and 65 years who had lost their mothers in the

previous two to five years. Data was collected with in-depth, unstructured interviews which began with a general statement. The interviewer then proceeded to ask the women to reflect upon the loss of their mothers.

The data was analyzed using a seven-step process of phenomenological analysis to find thematic commonalities (Kranz & Daniluk, 2002). Seven themes which reflected the meanings and experiences of mother-loss for the participants emerged from the data as follows: a profound sense of loss; a need to make sense of their mother's death; a need to reassess their relationship with their mothers; a sense of regret concerning lost opportunity; a sense of shifting roles and responsibilities; a reassessment of meaning and priorities in their lives; and a sense of enduring connection to their mothers (Kranz & Daniluk).

Kranz and Daniluk (2002) concluded that mother-loss is "an experience filled with a complex array of losses that are only fully realized over a period of months and years" (p. 12). Indeed, this particular loss for a daughter appears to take on "different meanings and developmental significance at different stages in a woman's life" (p. 13). Significantly, all of the women in the study reported being unprepared for the "intensity, depth, and extent of their feelings of loss" (p. 13). The researchers themselves suggest caution in making generalizations based on a sample size of nine white, middle class, North American or British born women. However, they also note that "like other significant life transitions, mother-loss appears to be an experience that can precipitate significant gains" (p. 14). In fact, they suggest that healing may be facilitated as women re-work their relationships with their mothers to the point where they can see the "positive legacies" (p. 15) of their mothers in their lives.

A major strength of this study lies in the discovery that the majority of these women did not feel, prior to the interview, that they had ample opportunity to discuss their mother's death (Kranz & Daniluk, 2002). This underscores the importance of a counsellor's work with women who have lost their mothers, in that women may need a place to have a voice and to process this loss. It seems that the process of discovering both a voice and a witness during the grieving process merits further attention and research, certainly considering the North American cultural message to mourn and move on (Valentich & Foote, 1998). Also, Kranz and Daniluk assert that the "emotional and psychological residue of mother-loss may be an important focus of clinical inquiry at all stages of the life course" (p. 15). Their work has succeeded in reflecting the need for further research which focuses on the effect of mother-loss at different stages of life, and the different ways that loss may be experienced throughout a lifetime. It is relevant, therefore, to continue to research and to specifically explore a woman's grief over time, to begin to delve into the intricacies of mourning.

Whereas Kranz and Daniluk (2002) expanded the mother-loss research further with their study of mid-life women who recently lost their mothers, Pill and Zabin (1997) have explored the "trauma of early maternal loss" for women who had not yet reached "full adulthood" (p. 180). Their study was unique in that the purpose of their study was to demonstrate the effectiveness of a group experience as a safe place "to recollect the death and life of the mother, to explore the daughter's relationship to her mother and to consider the impact of this loss on current life experiences" (p. 182). The authors co-facilitated four therapeutic groups meeting once a week for 12 one-and-a-half-hour sessions. There were a total of 26 women ranging from 24 to 56 years of age, with 6 to

24 years since their mother's death. It is not clear what the age range of the women were when their mothers died, but it would seem that at least some of the women in this study were young adults when they lost their mothers. This study revealed the healing sense of self created through relationship and connection with others and explored the concept of voice, and the strength in breaking the silences around death.

The group experience emphasized voicing "deeply held feelings" (Pill & Zabin, 1997, p. 182) and "validating and affirming ... unique shared experiences" (p. 182) as well as individual stories and experiences. Data were gathered during the group process and themes emerged over the course of the meetings. Reported themes included isolation and disconnection, confusion and inadequacy, unworthiness, insecurity and fear, and guilt. Pill and Zabin concluded that a therapeutic group offers support for emotion and an opportunity for women to revisit memory and to explore their relationship with their mothers. The group can be a place where the "women connect more fully with their mothers, which helps them find a place for their mothers within their ongoing emotional lives" (p. 192). Pill and Zabin note "the traumatic nature of early maternal loss ... and ... the necessity for careful therapeutic work on the life issues which surround the loss" (p. 194). Despite the lack of clarity regarding data collection and analysis of data, this research is significant in that it succeeds in documenting the importance of connection and expression and potential transformation in the grieving process. Pill and Zabin assert that the power of shared voices and shared narratives was both therapeutic and transformative.

Dietrich et al. (1999) also explored the power of narrative and voice and the subjective nature of mother-loss over time. From a pool of respondents to an

advertisement, Dietrich et al. (1999) selected five women with an attempt to vary age, marital status, similarity, and time elapsed since death. The five adult women ranged in age from 31 to 56. They had lost their mothers from 2 months to 20 years earlier. A strength of this study is that five profiles are provided to underscore the unique qualities of each participant and this gives the reader a connection to the participants, and gives the study an intimate quality. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe adult women's subjective experiences in grieving the loss of their mothers. The specific questions which guided the research were: "How do adult women experience the loss of their mother?" and "What meanings do they attach to the loss of their lifelong relationship with their mother?" (Dietrich et al., p. 80).

The data collection process included written narratives on their relationship with their mothers, two individual interviews of 60 to 90 minutes each, and a final group interview. The varied methods provide a rich, complex data set and allow for an in-depth exploration of each participant's reported experience. Each participant was given a blank journal and asked to describe the relationship they had with their mothers through any combination of narrative, poetry, photos, and/or letters. Then, in two video-taped interviews, each participant was invited to discuss the journal project and her loss experience. All women were asked: "What is life like for you now, without your mother's presence?" (Dietrich et al., p. 82). Finally, participants took part in a video-taped group session in order to validate the researcher's observations and themes and in order to comment on their experience as a participant in the research.

Dietrich et al. (1999) discovered that participants experienced the loss of their mothers "holistically, linking thoughts, feelings, and enactments of the mother-daughter

relationship" (p. 83). Seven themes emerged from the data. *Recalling* included women uncovering the nature of attachment with their mother, specifically considering their mother's caring and the struggles of relationship which included changing from a parent-child relationship to an adult-adult one. *Holding on* seemed to be an integral part of the process of separation but this only occurred over time. *Saying goodbye* in a symbolic way was an experience these women were able to engage in only when they had let go of their mother's physical being. *Longings of the heart* were aspects of the relationship the women wished had been different, including sub-themes of wanting to know more, regretting, and missing her. *Shifting patterns of relationship* included dealing with magnified family conflict, taking care of others, setting their own needs aside, and gaining support. *Recreating the dialogue* developed from a perception of their mother's continued presence, "reflecting the powerful spiritual dimension and intimacy of the mother-daughter relationship"(p. 88). This theme included sensing her presence, being like her, keeping remembrances, and exploring family history and tradition. *Honouring our mothers/ourselves* was a theme which reflected the meaning women discover within loss and included the value of giving voice to their mother's story and their own story and, ultimately, celebrating change (Dietrich et al.).

Dietrich et al. (1999) concluded that recreating the mother-daughter relationship and "merging past with present" (p. 91) appeared to facilitate the grieving process. They further underscored the significance the loss of this relationship had in each woman's experience of development and the "subtle sense of self-loss that is not easy for women to articulate or understand" (p. 93). The ongoing presence of a relationship with their mothers enabled these women to "rebuild their inner worlds" (p. 93) and continue to

develop as women. Dietrich et al. also suggest that grieving is not a single reality or a set of stages; rather it is an experience which continues over time and is "an emotional process embodying the vitality of the human spirit" (p. 92). This suggests that women have the opportunity to transform loss into an "experience of personal growth" by resolving and recreating the "mother-daughter connection" (p. 95). This study's strength lies in the researchers' commitment to presenting mother-loss as a holistic experience of "depth and breadth" (p. 96), an experience which merits further study. They conclude that this is a "transforming life experience" (p. 78) and suggest that "researchers might examine the experiences of one or two women over an extended period, in search of patterns" (p. 96).

Each of the previous studies contributes to the dialogue of mother-loss, exploring specific aspects of the loss experience for women at various developmental stages. Satlow (2002) focusses on the particular experience of mother-loss for young adult women (Satlow, 2002). Satlow's purpose was to examine how maternal loss during the young adulthood years interacts with the developmental tasks of young adulthood. Her sample included 11 Caucasian, well-educated, middle-class women who were 20 to 34 years old at the time of each mother's death. The duration of time since their mother's death ranged from 1 to 19 years. The sample of daughters was recruited by word of mouth and through the motherless daughters network.

Satlow conducted individual interviews that were semi-structured, open-ended and lasted 60 to 90 minutes. The sessions were audio-taped and transcribed, then sent to participants for clarification and confirmation. Satlow (2002) coded the interview text to identify categories and relationships between categories. Her results yielded 28 themes,

with three categories and eight sub-categories. Her three major categories included the mother-daughter relationship, the experience of maternal loss and the impact of the maternal loss on development.

Based on her findings, Satlow (2002) concluded that there are indeed shifts and changes in navigating developmental tasks after the death of a mother. She noted that "these shifts do not halt the developmental process, but rather shape its unfolding" (p. 188). The young adult motherless daughters in her study "prematurely encounter[ed] certain developmental tasks that otherwise, or typically, emerge later in the developmental process" (p. 189). This was particularly evident in that each participant struggled to come to terms with her own personal mortality after her mother's death. These untimely, "non-normative" maternal deaths created a "disruption in their developmental sequence" (p. 189). Satlow presents implications for the "emerging theory" of young adult motherless daughters as a result of her findings. In terms of the mother-daughter relationship, those daughters who perceived a "close and connected" relationship to their mother experienced "greater shifts and changes in their approach to ... developmental tasks" (p. 190). Also, daughters who experienced the loss as "unexpected and/or who did not receive ample family support tend[ed] to experience greater shifts and changes in their navigation of ... developmental tasks" (p. 190).

Satlow's (2002) study is important in that it begins to investigate the nature of young adult mother-loss. Her study was thorough and she clearly presented a number of developmental tasks that young adult women face. She explored how the loss of their mothers affected how these women negotiated these developmental tasks. Satlow contends that the over-riding task for young women is to develop a life plan, which

includes the "external markers" (p. 140) of career development, female friendships, partnership and intimacy, motherhood, religious and spiritual beliefs, and milestone events, as well as the "internal shifts" (p. 140) which occur in a woman's sense of self, her awareness of mortality, a revision of past goals and the creation of future goals. Satlow discussed each of these tasks with a detailed connection to mother-loss. She concluded that "a daughter's experience of losing her mother appears to shape and shift her self-narrative across a number of life domains ... [and] the death ... may inadvertently skew a daughter's perceptions and experiences such as to embrace the more desirable aspects of the mother-daughter relationship" (p. 170-171). She adds that this perception shift may provide "comfort and solace" (p. 171) for young women as they move toward accepting their grief. Satlow's research informs my own research process as I have made inquiry into my own experience as a young motherless woman and I have attended to my own self-narrative shifts across time and across different life domains.

Sigman and Wilson (1998) also investigated the role that connection with the lost mother plays in the grieving process. Based on a correlational study of mother-loss, they explored the impact of both sudden and traumatic death and non-traumatic death of mothers on 79 adult daughters between the ages of 17 and 68. These authors stress the complicated nature of "traumatic bereavement," in which a woman loses her mother in a sudden and perhaps horrific way. They stress the complexity of the interaction between trauma and bereavement and conclude that grief responses need to be "metabolized and integrated into the self structure" (p. 46) or the traumatic symptoms will "trigger" loss and attachment issues. Sigman and Wilson emphasize the need motherless women seem to have for psychic connection with their mothers. They conclude that "the loss of the

mother is a profound event and still occupies an emotionally distressed space in the minds of motherless daughters. Clearly, further studies are needed to analyze the diverse patterns of post-loss adaptation and development" (p. 48). In my study I have explored the lived experience of mother-loss and the meaning connected with this experience, particularly the longing for connection with the lost mother that these authors suggest motherless women seem to have as they move toward accepting their mothers' deaths.

Grumeretz (1995) contributed to the literature on mother-loss in her PhD dissertation by exploring women's experiences of accepting the death of their mothers and the implications for growth which arise from this acceptance. Grumeretz used a qualitative, heuristic method, connecting her own experiences and the experiences of nine other women aged 26 to 45, all of whom lost their mothers between the ages of 2 and 14 years of age. She interviewed each woman twice and had the women keep a journal in the two weeks between interviews. Her interview questions were spontaneous and open-ended. She analyzed the tapes from a heuristic approach. She shared the results with co-researchers for feedback before creating the final synthesis, a narrative designed to capture the essence of the common experience for these women.

Grumeretz's (1995) conclusions illuminate the theme that acceptance of death is a process. Based on her findings, she concludes that following such a loss, women have the need to feel connected to their mothers. There were a number of challenges the women in her study had to identify and work to understand in their grief: they felt that if they were "good" from now on they could avoid tragedy; they developed a fear that a loved one would die or leave; they searched for a mother figure; and they had the sense that they did not know how to be women. These women searched to establish an identity

separate from their mothers and worked towards growth and self-sufficiency. Grumeretz reports that many of the women in this study became aware of the need for meaningful, intimate relationships in their lives, and they became aware of their own strengths.

Grumeretz suggests that beginning to accept one's own death is perhaps the most profound gift of mother-loss. She concludes that the process of accepting involves "awakening" (p. 106) to meaning and to the impact of the loss. As the process of grief continues for a daughter, the potential is that "ultimately, she accepts her mother's death, affirms herself as a unique and whole person, and redefines her relationship with her mother" (p. 106-107). This positive focus on acceptance and affirmation and redefinition has informed my study in that within my own process of grief and acceptance I was interested in further exploring the possible gifts of mother-loss and the potential growth involved in processing grief.

Loss and Potential for Growth: Coping Strategies

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our striving
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time
(T.S. Eliot, 1975, p. 2552)

This is a study of death and grief and loss. I am aware of the complexity of my own experience of mother-loss. This research process was an opportunity to explore the potential for growth and transformation within the experience of loss. Rando (1988) asserts that grief does transform; however, she also acknowledges that with loss "you either can be richer for it or be diminished ... [and] you do have a choice over how you will let the loss affect you" (p. 280). Women who have experienced the loss of their mothers may well have lived through "the single most defining event of their lives" (Pill

& Zabin, 1997, p.186). For many, especially young women, this is “the most traumatic loss [they] can imagine and [they] have survived” (Edelman, 1995, p. 52). A significant death such as the loss of one's mother can frighten, but it can also inspire change in values and beliefs (Myers, 1986). Based on her clinical work, Viorst (1986) proposes that “losses are a part of life – universal, unavoidable, inexorable. And these losses are necessary because we grow by losing and leaving and letting go” (p. 16). In this framework, loss is a developmental nudge that can become a learning and a deepening because “we cannot become separate people, responsible people, connected people, reflective people without some losing and ... letting go” (Viorst, p. 326). It is a shift in focus to begin to research and explore the potential which exists within loss and the particular circumstances that will allow for growth.

In her theoretical dissertation, Douglass (1997) also celebrates this positive view of death and loss in her discussion of the motherline, an archetypal construct in which “the female lineage transcends the finality of death and offers women the felt sense of continuity and interrelatedness with all of life” (abstract). For Douglass, death is “an issue of the soul. It is not a problem to be understood and resolved, but rather a mystery to be experienced” (abstract). With this shift in perspective, a young woman can begin to see the death of her mother as a process of life, as a “soulful” experience, and through her mother’s death, she can potentially find meaning in her own life.

From this perspective, though losing a mother can result in profound sorrow, through the life-changing experience of mother-loss women also have the opportunity to develop a sense of autonomy and personal power, the courage to journey alone, a feeling of uniqueness, resilience, determination and a desire to create meaning in life (Edelman,

1994). Because these are the amazing discoveries that can come from death, it is important for daughters to recognize that "there is no shame in turning loss into life" (Edelman, p. 277). It is a paradox of life that even within the experience of loss and emptiness, it is quite possible to discover our own power. When a woman loses her mother, she can "become a conscious, unique, and separate self, exchanging the illusion of absolute shelter and absolute safety for the triumphant anxieties of standing alone" (Viorst, 1986, p. 326). It is also a paradox of life that as we learn to be alone, we can begin to realize and understand that we are never alone. This realization invites women to re-connect with their mothers, to find their mothers within themselves. This sense of aloneness and the journey and process through which a woman can come to the realization that she is not alone merits further study.

Kubler-Ross (1975) recognizes the importance of "dialogue with fellow human beings [in order to] begin to transcend ... individual existence, [and] becom[e] at one with yourself and others" (p. 145). With time and with mourning, as women voice their grief, they can "learn to live with the loss, and not under it" (Edelman, 1994, p. xxvii). Women can honour their mothers by giving voice to their mother's stories and by giving voice to their own stories as a celebration of the transition from life to death (Deitrich et al.). Women can "choose what to do with [the] dead ... and through mourning ... let the dead go and take them in" (Viorst, 1986, p. 264). I have studied this "quest for self-knowledge and integration," (Davidman, p. 49) a quest that may allow a woman to grow and may allow her to honour the memory of her mother as she moves through a process of grief and mourning.

Conclusion

Many researchers clearly call for further study into the particular experiences of women who have lost their mothers. Not only are researchers interested in the unity of human experience, but they are also interested in the diversity of human experience, the individual lived experience as a source of specific insights (Dietrich et al., 1999). Particularly, researchers (e.g. Edelman, 1995; Kranz & Daniluk, 2002) call for a focus on the experiences of mother-loss at different life stages. Researchers (e.g. Dietrich et al., 1999; Grumeretz, 1995) also have begun to experiment with the use of narrative writing within grief and loss research. It is clear that researchers and theorists are calling for voices to continue to connect human beings with one another, for voices to continue to express the lived experience of grief and mourning. I have documented my own grief experience and have further explored and embraced the meaning and the essence of the most profound experience of my life. I continue to be aware of the potential and the possibility my mother's death offers to me. I hope that my personal explorations and my commitment to awareness and to possibility will also contribute to the clinical and research literature on mother-loss. One voice can begin to encourage discussion, can begin to remind us as professionals that all human beings are interconnected, that all human beings share in the human condition.

Chapter Three

*Methodology**On Narrative Voice - Autoethnography*

The story of a life is less than the actual life, because the story told is selective, partial, contextually constructed and because the life is not yet over. But the story of a life is also more than the life, the contours and meanings allegorically extending to others, others seeing themselves, knowing themselves through another's life story, re-visioning their own.

(Richardson, 1997, p. 6)

Autoethnography, the study of the culture of the self, is a method of inquiry that connects "the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). More specifically, it is a form of study that "connects the ethnographic impulse, 'the gaze outward', with the autobiographical impulse, 'the gaze inward'" (Ellis, 1998, p. 49). This study is a particular form of autoethnography called personal narrative, in which "social scientists take on the dual identities of academic and personal selves to tell autobiographical stories" (Ellis & Bochner, p. 740). This form of research attempts to deepen a sense of connectedness, to enlarge our sense of the human community through shared personal and cultural truths. The narrative form stresses "the journey over the destination" (Ellis & Bochner, p. 744) and "offer[s] lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions" (Ellis & Bochner, p. 744). A major assumption of personal narratives is that "some experiences can be understood only when feelings are a significant part of the research process" (Ellis, 1993, p. 724).

In their work on autoethnographic narratives, Bochner and Ellis (1996) discuss how "personal narratives make it possible to converse about previously silenced and unspeakable topics and prepare us to appreciate and deal more humanely with the diversity of human experience " (p. 25). Through self-study, we have the opportunity to

break silences that we impose upon ourselves as a culture or as individuals.

Autoethnographic research is the opportunity to have a voice, to feel the personal power of expression, and to share that voice with others in order to "de-victimize ... to confirm and humanize tragic experiences by bearing witness" (Bochner, 2000, p. 271). Writing a personal narrative "is to produce [a] sense of continuity: to make a life that sometimes seems to be falling apart come together again" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 746). This form celebrates the complexity of life, and the narrative text shows "how we [change] over time as we [struggle] to make sense of our experiences" (Ellis & Bochner, p. 748).

Narrative inquiry is a catalyst for change both for self and for others because stories transform experience (Bochner, 1994; Ellis, 1996). Ellis (1998) describes the intricacies of personal loss narrative and its profound power as an agent of change:

I seek to tell stories that show our experiences as lived intimately and deeply; that represent the uniqueness of our losses, yet connect them to the losses of others so that they might be used as points of comparison or lessons in living; that may offer guidance in figuring out how to live; that encourage tellers and readers to re-story their experience and themselves as survivors while acknowledging the pain of loss; and that help all of us to understand and cope with our own losses, heal wounds, create meaning, and move ahead with our lives. (p. 50)

Autoethnography then "blurs the distinctions between social science and literature, personal and social, individual and culture, self and other, researcher and subject" (Ellis, 1998, p. 49). It is also a narrative form of writing which acknowledges the construction

of self, the ability we have as humans to be reflexive and to re-story our past experiences (Bruner, 1990).

Bruner (1990) postulates that human beings are an expression of culture and that "Self" is necessarily situated culturally and historically. We orient ourselves to the culture and to the past through reflexivity, the "capacity to turn around on the past and alter the present in its light, or to alter the past in the light of the present" (Bruner, p. 109). Human beings also have the intellectual capacity to "envision alternatives" (Bruner, p. 110), other ways of being in the world. For Bruner, the "Self" is connected in a net of other human beings, those people for whom we care and with whom we confide, and who may be "complicit in our narrative and our Self-constructions" (p. 114). Polkinghorne (1988) writes that the self is not "static," and that "we are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives" (p. 150). The self includes past history, present lived experience and possibilities for the future.

Laurel Richardson (2000a) explores the power of writing as a method of inquiry, and supports the postmodern claim that "writing is always partial, local, and situational, and that our Self is always present" (p. 930). She claims that postmodernists doubt that there is a "privileged form or authoritative knowledge," but allow that it is possible "to know 'something' without claiming to know everything" (p. 928). Researchers thus have the opportunity to "reflect upon method and explore new ways of knowing," particularly the "continual cocreation of Self and social science" (p. 929). Narrative is an illustration of this construction of "Self" and of the ways people come to know and come to understand:

If we wish to understand the deepest and most universal of human experiences, if we wish our work to be faithful to the lived experiences of people, if we wish for a union between poetics and science... then we need to foreground, not suppress, the narrative within the human sciences.

(Richardson, 1990a, p. 65)

Richardson (1997, 2000a) writes of the unifying possibilities of the blurred genre, where writing itself becomes central to the research endeavour, and the writing itself is both the process and the product of the research (Polkinghorne, 1988; Richardson, 2000a).

Richardson (2000a) proposes many creative ways to use narrative and writing as a method of inquiry, including the use of poetry as the "data" of research. Poetry "engage[s] the listener's body, even if the mind resists and denies" (p. 933). Because it is created from a visceral level, poetry also enables the listener to experience the poem on a visceral level, to connect with their own bodily responses. As a method of writing and inquiry, poetry allows the writer to play with words and lets the author and the audience "hear, see, and *feel* the world in new dimensions [creating] a *practical* and *powerful* method for analyzing social worlds" (p. 933). In a self-reflexive study of lived experience, evocative writing connects the emotional and the intellectual as it "touches us where we live, in our bodies. Through it we can experience the self-reflexive and transformational process of self-creation" (p. 931).

Carl Leggo (1995) also underscores the connections between narrative, lived experience, self and "storying the world." He sees the "value of narrative as a way of knowing and be/com/ing" (p. 5). Within his own poetry, Leggo words his experiences, his life, within poetic lines, just as the lines themselves shape him:

I now live
 in my poems...
 where sunlike
 I fuse
 connections
 line my life
 live lines
 without end (p. 11).

Leggo suggests that writing opens up the possibilities of "self-construction" and multiple truths: "Surely truth must be multifaceted and diverse and kaleidoscopic and prismatic and organic and ever changing" (p. 8). This corresponds to Richardson's (1997) conception that the validity of postmodern texts lies in their complexity, like the many facets of crystals, which can "reflect externalities *and* refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, arrays ... What we see depends upon our angle of repose" (p. 92). The crystal represents the multiple dimensions of truth, the reminder that, through "experimental representations" (Richardson, p. 91) understanding is "deepened, complex, thoroughly partial...we know more and doubt what we know" (p. 92). Richardson's assertions imply that the more we know, the more we understand that our knowledge is situated and partial.

Melisa Cahnmann (2003) also experiments with poetic form in research to "capture the essence of what [is] said - the feelings, contradictions, dualities, and paradoxes" (p. 33). She espouses using poetry in data collection, analysis and write-up, stating that it gives writers "the potential to make our thinking clearer, fresher, and more accessible and to render the richness and complexity of the observed world" (p. 34). From her perspective, poetry is a risk, a challenge to the self to transform. As a form, poetry enables authors to "name and claim feeling, story, and relationship ... [and] to communicate findings in multidimensional, penetrating, and more accessible ways" (p.

33). She notes that little has been written about how poetry can be used in research, calling for "artist-researchers" to share the processes and products of poetic research.

I have experimented with poetry as narrative autoethnography to voice my experience of the death of my mother. Narrative method "humanizes time" and illustrates how "one's life is separable from others ... but, because of that separation, one can be an integrated whole - a being with its own unique past, present, and future ... [which] provides the opportunity for the individual to make existential sense of mortality" (Richardson, 1997, p. 31). This is the paradox of life: "the future is always death" (p.

29). Poetry has enabled me to reflexively experience my mother's death and to contemplate my own. Poetry also gives others the opportunity to witness my experience, to feel, through my evocative text (Ellis, 1997), their own subjective response to my writing and to the inevitability of death in all of our lives. Both the reader and I have the opportunity to experience and to witness transformation through wording and reading my experience of grief and loss.

Procedure: Data Creation And Data Inquiry

How, then, do we write ourselves into our texts with intellectual and spiritual integrity? How do we nurture our own voices, our own individualities, and at the same time lay claim to "knowing" something?

(Richardson, 1997, p. 2)

We need to return to the original quest in human science, where the word inquiry meant "to quest" - the quest meaning spiritual, personal, meaningful inquiry

(Arvay, 2002, p. 219)

Bochner and Ellis (2002) proclaim that there are no specific methodological procedures for students or scholars who are considering autoethnography as a method of research. In light of this assertion, I have consulted Laurel Richardson's (1990a, 1993, 1997, 2000a) ideas on writing-stories and experimental representation in order to fully

explore the data of my poetry and the process of writing and research and self-creation that is personal narrative. I have also used as a model for my research the personal loss narrative structure used by Carolyn Ellis (1991a, 1991b, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998) in which the narrative structure itself is used as a framework to explore emotions and the process of grief.

I have re-visited the poems that I have written about my mother and about her death. These poems were written over the nine years since her death in 1995. Of course, I continued to write poems throughout this process, and these became a part of the "field notes" (Cahnmann, 2003; Ellis, 1995) of my research. I also kept "writing stories" (Richardson, 1997, 2000) on the process of revisiting these poems in the form of a reflexive journal and a research journal. In the reflexive journal, I explored how I have experienced the off-time death of my mother and my process of grief and meaning-making. I engaged in an inquiry of the themes and patterns within my poetry, and I was aware of my emotional responses to the poems and to the research process as well, looking to the past, feeling in the present, and re-shaping the future. In the research journal, I documented my academic voice, my struggles and my creative relationship with this method and with the process of researching grief and loss, my writing style, the voice and tone of my poetry and any shifts that occurred in my style as I wrote during the research process.

I re-experienced my poetry and used both the reflexive and the research journals to create "writing stories" (Richardson, 1997, 2000a) about the experience of moving into the poems of grief and loss. Writing stories are narratives which "offer critical reflexivity about the writing- self [which] evoke new questions about the self ... [and] can evoke

deeper parts of the [s]elf, heal wounds, enhance the sense of self - or even alter one's sense of identity" (Richardson, 2000a, p. 931-932). These narratives, in the form of poems, journals, and dream recreations are a multi-layered exploration of the poems themselves, my responses to the experience of revisiting the poems, and also my writing about the process of writing poems and journals and academic papers and analyses.

I also modelled my data creation and my inquiry on Ellis, with the use of introspection, or emotional recall (Ellis, 1991b, 1995; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Self-introspection is a process which involves the researcher's "conscious effort to be aware of awareness, ... to examine self and feelings, and to record systematically self-reflections" (Ellis, 1991a, p. 129). Introspection involves probing deeply into an emotional self and exploring the emotions, thoughts and the bodily sensations that arise. The response "consists of interacting voices" (Ellis, 1991a, p. 128). Ellis (1991b) is fascinated with "the complex, ambiguous... nature of emotional experience" (p. 23) and asserts that introspection "provides a way to look at the lived experience of emotions" (p. 45). Ellis (1995) used introspection to create a narrative about her relationship with Gene Weinstein and particularly about her emotional response to his chronic illness and to his eventual death. She created a "metastory" about the process of writing a personal loss narrative, and this story frames the story of her partner's illness and death and serves as a witness to "a text that [she] constructed and that, in turn, constructed [her]" (p. 9). Like Ellis (1995), I acknowledge that I am emotionally connected to my research; I am, as she proposes, both the "author/researcher and the subject" (p. 311). Within her research, Ellis cites academic sources sparingly as I also propose to do, in order to acknowledge that the writing of her research is "from relational and emotional experience" (p. 314).

Ellis (1993) refers to her method of introspection as "emotional recall." She imagines being back in the past emotionally and physically in order to connect with details and immerse herself in the past (Ellis, 1993; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This process stimulates the memory and makes for more intense recall (1993). Ellis and Bochner write that it is necessary both to move into experience and to move out as a witness to the experience: "it's good to write about an event while your feelings are still intense, and then to go back to it when you're emotionally distant" (p. 752). I wrote my poems in moments of loneliness and grief and questioning, moving into my emotions through words. This poetic data served as a witness to the intensity of the experience, and I re-experienced the poems both emotionally and analytically. I had the "distance" of years; however, I am still today within the process of grief, a human being, never entirely objective. It is this subjectivity and my awareness of the grieving process as an ongoing experience that lend richness and complexity to my data.

I read both the poems and the "field notes" with my research question in mind, an inquiry into the transformation of my relationship with grief, my relationship with my mother and my relationship with self. I used both the knowledge I have gained from my degree in English Literature and the knowledge I have gained from twelve years teaching the analysis of literature in order to analyze the poems and the "field notes", looking for repeated thematic patterns across the poems and looking for the richness of metaphor, imagery, symbol, and paradox that inform poetic inquiry. The tools of my inquiry included reflexivity, intuition, emotional resonance, and an awareness of patterns, themes, and metaphor. Poetry is the door into self and the door into process. I have explored these two layers of transformation, containing within these pages a dual

consciousness. The first layer is connected with the transformation of grief, of self, of relationship that has occurred and is reflected within the poetry of the past nine years.

The second layer is connected with the transformation of grief, of self, of relationship that is occurring throughout the research process as documented in both the reflexive and the research journal "field notes".

Evaluative Criteria

In our hearts, if not our minds, we know that the phenomena we study are messy, complicated, uncertain, and soft.

(Bochner, 2000, p. 267)

Both Bochner (2000) and Richardson (2000a, 2000b) discuss their desire for researchers to be both scientific and literary. Bochner (2000) celebrates the idea that writing is a means to stimulate discussion, and he is "baffled" by the "obsessive focus" of some researchers in their call for evaluative criteria: "Sometimes I feel that criteria are the very means we ourselves created to contain our desire for freedom and experience, a way of limiting our own possibilities and stifling our creative energy" (p. 267). He does, however, acknowledge the complexity of any research endeavour and recognizes that criteria can be a guide to help us "understand and feel with a story" (p. 270). He offers the following guidelines as a means of evaluating "poetic social science" (p. 269). First, he looks for "abundant, concrete detail; concern not only for the commonplace, even trivial routines of everyday life, but also for the flesh and blood emotions of people coping with life's contingencies; not only facts but also feelings" (p. 270). Secondly, he is "attracted to structurally complex narratives ... reflecting the non-linear process of memory work" (p. 270). Third, he is aware of "the author's emotional credibility, vulnerability, and honesty" (p. 270). Fourth, he "prefers narratives that express a tale of

two selves; a believable journey from who I was to who I am, a life course reimagined or transformed by crisis" (p. 270-271). Fifth, he "holds the author to a ... standard of ethical self-consciousness" (p. 271). He wants to see that the author has concern "for the kind of person one becomes in telling one's story" (p. 271). It is also important to Bochner that the author provide a space "for the moral commitments and convictions that underlie the story" (p. 271). Finally, Bochner writes: "I want a story that moves me, my heart and belly as well as my head ... that show[s] me what life feels like now and what it can mean" (p. 271).

Richardson (2000b) acknowledges that when writing is situated in the human arena, this writing encompasses "both the strengths and limitations of human perceptions and feelings" (p. 254). She writes of the importance of creating new criteria for new ways of writing. In this way, the human sciences can have access to different forms of research: "Creative arts is one lens through which to view the world; analytical/science is another. We see better with two lenses. We see best with both lenses focused and magnified (2000b, p. 254).

Richardson (2000b) offers five criteria in the form of questions and sub-questions for experimental writing. First, she asks about the contribution of the piece: "Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social-life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) human-world understanding and perspective? How has this perspective informed the construction of the text?" (p. 254). Her second consideration is the aesthetic merit of the piece: "Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytical practices open up the text, invite interpretive

responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?" (p. 254).

Her third criteria addresses the concept of reflexivity:

How did the author come to write this text? How was the information gathered?

Ethical issues? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a

product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the

reader to make judgments about the point of view? (p. 254)

Richardson's fourth area of focus is the impact of the writing. In this regard, she asks:

"Does this affect me? emotionally? intellectually? generate new questions? move me to

write? move me to try new research practices? move me to action?" (p. 254). Her final

criteria focuses on the expression of reality: "Does this text embody a fleshed out,

embodied sense of lived-experience? Does it seem "true" - a credible account of a

cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the "real"?" (p. 254).

I have endeavoured to keep the criteria of both Bochner (2000) and Richardson (2000b) uppermost in my mind as I moved through this research process and I invite the audience to do the same as they read both my poetry and my thematic analysis. In order to ensure that I have created research that has worth to the field of counselling psychology and to the human sciences, I kept my field notes avidly on many different levels, and I consulted with my supervisors regularly for feedback, support, objectivity and suggestions.

I also moved outside of my self to consult with two women who experienced mother-loss in young adulthood. One of the women is now in her early 40's and was in her late 20's when she lost her mother to liver cancer within three months of diagnosis. The second woman is now in her late 30's and was in her late 20's when she lost her

mother suddenly in a car accident involving a drunk driver. I asked these women to read the results of my study and to read only the poems first. I asked them to consider the following two questions: Do the poems resonate with your own experience in any way? If you were asked to pull four or five themes from the poems, what would they be? After they had considered the poems, I asked them to read my thematic analysis and consider the following three questions: Is my discussion of themes coherent? Do the themes that I have discussed connect in any way with the themes that you recognized? If not, what do you think of the themes that I have chosen to discuss?

The three of us used the questions as a guide for a two-hour taped discussion. Both women had read my poems and pulled five themes from them. The themes that each woman recognized were strikingly similar to the themes that I had documented. They sometimes named a theme differently, but the ideas contained within their themes connected to the ideas within my thematic analysis. A few of the themes the women had chosen were not discussed specifically within the thematic analysis section of my thesis. For example, one of the women noted the themes of audience and transformation, both of which are connected to the purpose of my study. Both women commented that my discussion of the themes was coherent and clear. Of course, the five themes that I chose to include in my analysis are by no means exhaustive. It is my hope that readers will also discover themes and consider meaning that I have not discussed.

Both women stated that the poems did resonate with their own experience of loss, particularly the emotional content of the poems. Even though our specific experiences with loss and our particular relationships with our mothers were different, we shared a common connection through our losses. Certain lines and images and even entire poems

resonated with their experiences. Our discussion was deeply touching and profound as we moved in and out of the poems and in and out of our own experiences. The poems provided us with an opportunity to share emotions and stories that we may never have offered otherwise.

I have attempted to create space for multiple interpretations of this writing. I believe that my own self has a multiplicity of voices and many layers to share, different perspectives from different vantage points on the life journey. I understand that I have not only documented a personal exploration of my experience, but that I have also created a piece of academic research for the public domain. I am aware that my writing itself is the strength and/or the limitation of this study. I am also aware that subjectivity is a necessary part of my research and that it can potentially be both a strength and a limitation of this research. Quite simply, my primary goal continues to be the celebration of voice and transformation.

Chapter Four

Results

September, 2003

I stand on the periphery of memory
I have not yet moved into
my poems
my past

I prepare for this journey,
gather energy to enter
into the pages of grief

Today, the back of my throat aches,
a physical burning,
a bright pink swelling,
a whiteness

I drink lemon and honey
hot and sweet

I lie in hot water
I breathe with difficulty
(a reminder)

You used to bring me life-savers,
tropical and sweet,
to soothe, to heal

You wait for me in the
center of these words -
a stillness

I know I stand carefully
on the edge of writing (you),
my eyes closed

You will be with me as
I write, as I feel and
question and
struggle and celebrate

You are with me

May 26, 2003

My poems, the data of this project,
were hidden within journals,
written in pencil,
soft, faded

I begin this reflection process
in ink -
a risk, a willingness
to make mistakes
that I cannot erase away

I admit to fear and
doubt and a mind
full, full

I acknowledge a need
to do well,
to be good at this
endeavour

I read and talk and
dream and think
and cry and
I laugh

I feel my heart expand,
a willingness
to be open,
to be bold,
courageous, honest

I feel my shoulders,
neck, jaw (stiff)

I hear my belly
(trust, trust)

And my heart is certain -
so strong and
resilient and
unscathed

I begin the dialogue
between heart, mind,
body, spirit
the necessary dialogue
magical,
whole.

Introduction

This chapter is an exploration of the multi-layered transformation of self within the process of grief. Through the writing and the reading of poetry written over the past nine years, I make inquiry into the transformation of my relationship with grief, my relationship with my mother and my relationship with myself. I also explore the transformation of grief, self, and relationship that has occurred throughout this research process. Within these pages I introduce the poetry of my own personal journey of grief and loss. This poetry serves not only to reveal transformation of self over time, it also served and serves as a catalyst for transformation in the moments of writing and re-writing and in the moments of reading and analyzing.

The results of this autoethnography are not static. With every moment and every poem that I write, I feel a shift within me. It is becoming even more clear to me that the process of grief is circular - it moves around me and continues to shape who I am and who I will become. I believe it is impossible to capture a *final* result of this experience; however, I will endeavour to express the experience as clearly and solidly as possible in these moments while I write.

I include within this chapter selected poems from my personal journals. I have chosen to include these complete poems within the body of this thesis because I believe that the poems I have written are not only an integral part of the process of exploration and investigation, they are also a central component of the product of this thesis. It is my belief that the poems could stand alone as documentation of the process of grief and transformation. Also, within this chapter, I have included poems from the research and

reflexive journals which serve to provide insight into the process of reading and analyzing the poems and into the process of writing this paper.

Within this chapter, I examine five themes that move within and across the poems, and through an analysis of these themes, I document and provide evidence of the cyclical nature of my grieving process. As I discuss each of the themes, I explore also the many levels of transformation that are revealed. Perhaps the most significant transformation I have witnessed is the shift in my own awareness of transformation itself. I have been amazed to discover the subtleties involved in the shaping of grief and self and relationship - the shifts within mind, emotion, and body. I have lived these shifts and developed an awareness that with every moment, with every word I am transforming.

It is important to note that the learning has not been easy. It is important to note that my relationship with my mother, both in life and after death, was not always easy. Many of the poems I wrote focus on the process of my grief and the loss of those qualities I cherished and loved, rather than on the complexities of my relationship with my mother and my family when she was alive. When my mother died, I felt as though a part of me had died as well. Even though she was not the ideal mother and our relationship was fraught with secrets and pains and mistakes and all kinds of human frailties, I loved her fiercely, with intensity. Perhaps I loved her this way in part because of the complexity of our relationship. I know I loved her for her willingness to love me (and others) whole-heartedly, unabashedly, unconditionally. I know I loved her for her warmth, her goodness, her softness. She was able to reveal to me her amazing spirit and it is my memory of her spirit, and my experience of her spirit over the past nine years that have facilitated and continue to facilitate my grieving process.

Poetic Data

February 2, 1995

Words that once came easily
 falter, stumble
 How can I describe how I feel?
 How can I transfer this pain to the page?
 Mom has been dead for a month -
 a concept so strange to me -
 She fills my world
 still
 my concern for her
 my love for her
 my anger towards her.
 My mind moves and moves.
 My heart (broken)
 keeps listening, hoping to hear
 someone beside me, holding me,
 enveloping me.
 But I stand apart.
 I watch myself fall apart.
 I am so tired, so uncertain,
 so lonely, so full of need -
 I fear I will collapse from the weight

March 9, 1995

My life is circular
 I attempt to move outside of the shape,
 outside of the grief,
 but it doesn't end; it never will end.
 Your life ended.
 I search for hope and I feel
 the tiniest part of myself
 ready, alive, willing to grow,
 to move, to develop.
 I feel the beginnings of strength.
 But the fear is overwhelming,
 the pain, the sense of being alone -
 of always having been alone.

April, 1995

Dear Mom,

I miss you at the oddest moments- during the Sound of Music; when I eat certain foods; at night on Sunday when we used to talk. Often.
I wonder if you can see me or if you try to hold me, because I try to hold onto you, all that is you - even if that means holding onto the painful memories as well.
I often doubted you, doubt myself. I feared for you too - your judgement, your weakness. But I know you had strength as well - I know you must have.

It is Easter Sunday and I have made a trip out to Jamieson Creek.
This weekend was so strange without you.
I think I will be o.k. because my friends are taking care of me.
I guess I am not really certain what I want to say.
It seemed the right thing to do to come out here and to feel the memories, my feelings.
I can see us in the water, laughing, the dogs wild on the shore, afraid to jump in with us.
The rock is cold underneath me. I feel cold too, and alone.
The water rushes past me and the noise passes through me and I miss you.
I wonder where you are and I hope it is better for you.
I am still trying to take care of you and it makes me sad that I cannot seem to let go, to let loose all the pain I have inside of me. I wonder if you can help, but I know that I need to help myself. I am trying, mom.
I think I just need to know that the really awful part is over and that I can control, at least in part, the rest of my life. I know I try to control it too much, I know.

I wonder what you thought and felt at all the different stages of your life.
I considered asking you and now that vacuum of no answers, of not knowing stretches infinitely. I don't know where you are or what happens when we die.
I trust that you were right in your faith that you would look down on me, that you look down on me now as I write. I hope so because you loved this place.
The pain of this grief keeps me closed. Help me to open it up, to look inside and maybe we can stop this cycle of pain, maybe you can watch over me like I tried to watch over you. Or maybe I can do it alone.

I miss you and I love you.

Your daughter, Angie

May 31, 1995 (May 6, 1966 -my birthday; May 8, 1939 - my mom's birthday)

I made it through the first May of many without you
 I spent most of it tired, lonely, discouraged.
 My life is so many questions,
 a continual search
 I think this time I might truly change;
 this time I will begin to live.
 I think now I can make a conscious choice
 to move forward, to look forward
 because I know that forward isn't
 away from you.
 I think now you are all around me,
 within me.
 I miss you; I love you;
 I am sad without you,
 but I will be o.k.

May 6, 1996

On my 30th birthday
 an odd assortment of feelings.
 I miss my mom so much it amazes me still -
 to be so aware
 of the absence of a phone call,
 the absence.
 I am still adjusting to this
 state of existing alone.
 At times I feel I could grow quite used to it.
 There are no expectations to fulfill;
 there is no one to hurt,
 no one to let down.
 I sometimes doubt love,
 but today,
 I value the truth of friendship;
 the fact that I am loved -
 this overwhelms me too -
 On this day, I am full of emotion.
 I continue to pray
 I hope somewhere my mom can hear me
 that she will somehow take care of me.
 I try to care for myself;
 I try to live;
 I try to be happy,
 to give to others,

to love.

I love you mom
and I miss you as much as
I thought I would.

July 9th, 1996

dear mom

I met someone and
I feel fear
 I feel alone
I fear mistakes
(but) I want to venture outside of myself
I want to live, to give you (me)
something to be proud of.
I rarely risk my heart
I want to feel you with me
protecting me - is that possible?
Do I create a romantic ideal of you
 in my head?
How much control do you have?
Must you watch me fall, watch me
 consider falling?
My mind is full of you and I
 reach around the truth
 I reach under the pain
I feel I am an imposter

How can I relate my world
to another human being?

Must I go through?

 Must I miss
 you?

July 9th, 1996

I stand apart and witness
transformation
I recall who I was
 who I am

I still have no coherent
 answers for my questions.
 my mind does not connect
 with my heart.
 my heart remains
 closed - partly dead.
 I carry the pain
 like a treasure
 holding it in front of me
 to ward off intruders,
 to warn off trespassers.
 Who can say they know
 when it seems
 unfathomable.

August 8th, 1996

A dream with mom in it
 -so real, so normal-
 Plans to drive on a
 trip
 She doesn't want to go
 for some reason -
 she begins to weep
 to sob
 She falls from the driver's seat
 and hangs, limply,
 from the car door
 and I feel angry with her
 order her to tell me
 what is wrong
 finally state that I
 cannot
 help
 if she won't tell me the
 problem
 She looks at me
 bereft
 and the phone pulls me
 awake,
 left with that
 empty
 space -
 left with her eyes
 and the knowledge

(inescapable)
that she is
(dead)
no longer with me
I cannot hurt her
I cannot help her
I feel guilt and sorrow
and this
pain.

December 11, 1996a

Sounds from the street
fill the room
but not my heart
I understand that words do less
than I plan
I try too hard
I always do when
it truly matters
when each word
truly matters
I feel the emotions of others
a strange gift
I feel the emotions of others,
hold power
but am
powerless
Sounds from the t.v.
fill the room
but not my head.

December 11, 1996b

Elaine
 You and I
 sat on the couch and watched
 Quincy face impossible
 unusual death
 an autopsy which always
 revealed
 the truth
 I spend my life,
 now,

without you.
 I have faced
 impossible,
 unusual death
 and I undergo
 autopsy after autopsy
 struggling to reveal
 truth
 to understand

My vital organs
 are revealed,
 my scarred lungs
 still breathe.

I watch others
 face the
 impossible,
 the unusual

I want you here
 beside me -
 a milkshake
 a cold french fry-

I curled myself
 into the space
 you created with
 your bent legs -
 even after I
 no longer fit,
 you created space
 for me-

I curl myself to
 sleep each night
 and count the days,
 the years between you
 and me
 anniversary is a
 word I dread
 I am ambivalent about my
 telephone-
 it once brought me
 your voice,
 your love,
 your Happy New Year-
 (once)

the phone rings again
and again as I
touch my friends
goodbye - not knowing
how good I will become at good-byes-
the message is left again
and again as I
drive home to receive it

(a new year)

December 11, 1996

I watch her
 watch her father die
 day after day
I watch her
 be brave for him
 be detached
I watch her
 remember another
 death, another
 cancer spreading
I exist in the room
 beside her
 the room above
 helpless to change this
 pattern of death
I watch myself
 (not detached
 not brave)
I watch myself
 drink wine
 dance by myself
I watch others
 from a distance
 afraid to touch
 them
 afraid they
 will
 die

How can the images and loves and pains
and fears simply vanish?

(Where are you?)

It feels as if you have always
been here

I feel you in the warmth of sun
breaking through clouds.

May 6, 1997

I draw breath inward
But my lungs refuse to fill
the air remains
still
within me

I cannot turn my head away
from the sounds of voices
in my ear
whispering in a language
my mind cannot
translate
words I do not understand

I do not understand
this moment that was a year
this loose time

I hold my tightly
closed fist
beside my ear
(make it stop
make it stop)

head tilted
eyes lifted

May 7, 1997a

Tonight I feel full
of emptiness – this
space crowds inside of
my closed chest.

(I cannot breathe still.)

I cannot remember how
 long I have been
 closed, how often
 I have pushed
 others away.

Tonight I hear the
 tears I cannot
 cry – I feel the heavy
 weight within
 my throat.

I cannot wake to the
 morning without
 fear of all the
 other mornings
 without her.

And I hear the voices again
 but I understand now
 the words –
 simple, hollow, impossible –

I will never hold her,
 will never be held
 I cannot feel her soft
 cheek on my forehead
 She will never tell me
 stories or bake me
 shortbread.

I cannot see her anymore
 and I want to
 sit down, to rest my
 eyes, to stop seeing
 this world without her

And I know how selfish
 I am – I know how
 wrong I was.

Forlorn is a word I
 create today – it defines
 itself within
 my body.

May 7, 1997b

If I could have you back for tomorrow
 I have no idea what I would say,
 what I would do.
 I have dreamed you so often,
 felt your presence in my sleep.
 I think I would not be able to let you go
 That is always the learning for me.

I just want you to make me laugh again
 I just want to laugh.
 Instead I cry again, again
 I wonder if you are here with me
 or if you can never touch me again
 I can't feel you now and
 I don't know if I am closed to you
 or if you are truly gone.
 I try to talk with you,
 to hear you
 I listen, but maybe I do not speak
 clearly enough
 maybe I do not hear you
 I miss you always and the intensity does not change
 (it weakens and strengthens me.)

May 9, 1997

Spaghetti Does Stick to Walls

All I need to do is move eyes over
 walls and up to ceiling to
 believe that spaghetti does stick to walls
 I am not surprised -
 only annoyed

I must peel it off
 and there is no
 softness here
 The pasta leaves white traces
 on the peeling wallpaper as I
 touch it off the wall -
 brittle,
 unforgiving -

I consider the effort
 necessary to completely
 hide this mess

I imagine myself
 reaching beyond
 cupboards
 to the ceiling

I consider
 leaving it there -

I imagine the chances of
 getting hurt either way -

I finally decide to leave
 the last, hard, dry
 strand on the ceiling -
 yellow against what
 used-to-be-white -

I keep it there as a reminder
 of all
 the messes I have
 cleaned
 for her.

She does not seem to
 notice it there,
 in the corner,
 curling around itself.

She laughs at her spontaneity,
 her silly behaviour
 She reprimands herself
 and pulls her forehead together
 over her inability to
 swallow food this morning

I do not laugh
 I only consider
 the image of her
 throwing pasta
 again and
 again

and the truth -
 spaghetti does stick to walls

May, 1997

Dear Mom,

I have never wanted to write this letter to you
if I had had the choice it would
always have been to avoid this moment.
But I am learning the limited choice I have.
So it is time to write this good-bye that I find
so amazingly difficult.

Without your voice, my world is varying shades of grey.
I haven't seen colour in a very long time.

I miss your voice awfully.

When the phone rings, I still think it might be you

I still reach to phone you

when I feel happy

when I feel alone and empty.

I don't know if you understood how much

you meant to me,

how much I needed to know

you believed in me,

you loved me.

It all doesn't seem to matter as much

when I can't tell you about it.

One hundred percent makes no difference now-

only your laughter,

your tears could make that worthwhile.

This is the third May to pass since your death.

It gets no easier.

I cry and feel alone.

I avoid my friends.

I feel uncomfortable in my own life.

You are missing.

I say goodbye but that does not mean you will disappear for me -

I see you in every pansy

every rust coloured piece of hair

every fork that I hold

every batch of cookies I create

every ocean beach

every piece of driftwood

every drying bunch of herbs

every squash

every barbeque
every thing you ever touched

I see you in me

You touched me more than I knew
more than I imagined

You will stay inside me

I watch my face become yours and
I am not afraid.

I love you

I miss you.

I write these words so you will
see the testimony

so I can read the words
the solidity of words I have
always loved so much.

July 2, 1997

Where there were once words,
now, there is only empty page.

I feel I cannot possibly fill
the space

I have become skilled

I am an expert

I do not want this expertise

This loss envelopes me

I read these words,
these letters

and there is no meaning

I only know feeling

I experience this doubt,
this lack of trust,

this inability to believe

that anyone could know the pieces
of my heart

I spend time in dyads,
triads,

alone

I feel the futility of words.

August 16, 1997

I constantly reach for my hair
 reassured by the lack of length
 the lack of decorum
 I feel the change
 I have created
 It goes through my mind
 it goes within me
 The loss does not pass -
 it continues to shape me -
 I do not mind
 letting go of who I was.

September 12, 1998

I see you in the faces of others
 I recognize your jewelry,
 your clothes, the weight
 of your arm resting on a chair
 I see you in the tears of another woman
 (not you)
 I touch my forehead to remind myself
 this is not you
 I stop myself from holding on tightly
 to strangers
 I hold myself on this night when
 I share my bed with another
 I only want to hear your voice.

October 6, 1998

This is a theme, a line which
 traces itself through my life
 I come to this place
 again and again
 and I recognize it
 But I watch myself move as though
 I have no part in the movement
 I still watch myself decide
 or not decide
 I see my heart close
 my eyes blink
 I hold on to this hour -

minute by minute
I feel myself grip too tightly
to avoid
pushing away.

October 21, 1998

M.L - A Search

I write this not so much as a
letter but as a way of being
closer to you somehow
I don't know if such
a thing is possible -
All I know is I feel this
hollowness in my body -
this center in my head
which does not stop
I speak quickly
I feel too deeply
I push people away
I am afraid that no one
will know me
that I create too many rooms
that the hallway is too long
I feel sometimes that you are
so many years away from me
so far away that I can't touch you
The pain is still with me
I don't trust others
I don't even know if I
trust myself
I search for pieces
of you
inside of me
I have your fear, but I don't know
if I have your softness,
your kindness
I feel the temptation
to pull away - to be alone
I feel alone anyway
even when I am
surrounded by others
When you lived, I didn't want
to hear your story

I was afraid of it,
of you,
of the depth in you
I am afraid now that
others pull away from me
for the same reason
I have this depth of sorrow
I can't seem to contain
it surprises me with intensity
I think I miss you
but it is so much more -
I miss myself
this person I know I am
underneath this anger
and pain and self-doubt
I think about you
I want to feel you too.

November 15, 1998

I believe there is life,
 a passion within my body
I believe there is a love
 I have been forgetting
 I have ignored
I believe in myself and
 I know I will create and give
I believe in this power I have
 to feel and express
I believe I will continue
 to heal and to walk into life,
 into love with arms raised,
 eyes upward
I have moved
I have been motionless
I have cried and cried
I have been cold, unmoved
I have shut the doors to my self
I have left them wide open
I have been alone
I have been loved
I welcome this moment

June 10, 1999

Separation is a word
 I am
 familiar with
 I have spent time
 with the fear of it
 I begin to see the
 other
 possibilities
 I see the moments
 I will spend
 alone
 I will feel the spaces
 within me
 shift
 I will feel
 me
 the power of alone

July 25, 1999

Voices speak to me from
 a place where I have
 never journeyed
 I hear the beckoning tone
 of the wind over
 impossible colours
 I will follow these
 distinct, moving
 harmonies
 I will put one foot in front
 of the other
 I will look around myself
 all around
 I will ask questions of
 your aunt, your uncle
 to add depth and contour
 I will allow the whispers
 of other lives
 to enter into me
 I will hear them
 I will listen.

August 9, 1999a

I move through the sky
 to the place of your
 family (my family)
 I feel your words,
 words you have
 not yet given
 a voice
 I understand your search
 I travel a solitary line,
 I move away from you
 (toward you)
 You move, keep moving
 I desire stillness
 The plane begins to
 descend
 into this world of
 your life
 this world of
 my past
 There are answers
 within my skin

August 9, 1999b

the softness of a child's skin
 touches my elbow
 he does not flinch
 or move away
 he is not afraid of this
 contact
 I feel the warmth
 I lean into this life
 I move into my own
 future
 minute by minute
 I have come to realize
 the breath of my
 lungs moves me
 forward
 I will do what I can to
 be extraordinary
 to live meaningfully
 I will be inspired

by these moments
of touch
of contact.

August 13, 1999

This arriving and leaving
is a pattern in my life
I return to this city
I have chosen as home
I create my own place
my own safety
I will step off this plane
and the faces will
change - the distinct
look of this coast
I leave flat land behind
I will listen to the message
I keep hearing
(find your own place
find your own place)
I do not need to look far -
it is within me

September 6, 1999

Tomorrow the world will spin on
a different axis
I will learn to balance
I will walk differently
I will breathe, move,
notice
Each new sky reminds me
of this change -
the importance of
each moment
I feel this weight - not
heavy, not a burden -
a noticeable reminder
It moves inside of me -
a gentle pressure at
my temple
a tightening at the
base of my skull

a closing in my throat
I am willing to listen
to understand

November 22, 1999

to my mother

monday night and
the rain falls,
continues to fall
I remember moments
waiting for your return
for your warmth,
your company
I hear you within the
water falling against
my window
you will be forever falling
in this city of
water
you never left me
you never even
considered it
you fall,
you continue

November 28, 1999

Sound fills my throat until I can do
nothing but let it out
The night surrounds me
I cling to stone,
the support of clay walls
I do not move; I blend in -
withdraw from the noise of this
endless evening
I seek warmth, heat even
within the cracks,
the flaws of these dwellings
I see too much from the
side of my small face
I cannot turn away -
my voice gets lost
in the dark air.

January 14, 2000 Perth

today it rains in this dry city
 an unusual occurrence
 the wind turns outside
 the rain stops
 I open the door to cool air
 I will move
 I carry hesitation above me
 my body stretches
 stiff with neglect
 my joints catch
 I will no longer be afraid
 I walk out onto cobbled
 pavement
 my feet tender on the
 cold wet tiles
 a terror builds,
 subsides.

February 8, 2000

I cry for the afghan,
 for the voice,
 the words
 of my mother
 I listen, I listen

February 25, 2000

You arrive in the form of a stranger
 You talk to me about protection,
 guidance, love
 I understand and I don't
 I am afraid
 I carry fear with me
 inside me
 When I sleep, the terror
 builds inside
 I cannot translate the messages:
 displacement
 forgetting
 mortality
 searching

I reach out from my dreams
 into this world
 I try to touch substance
 I begin to ask questions
 no one can answer
 I struggle to decipher
 You tell me not to struggle,
 to ask for answers from
 another world,
 a higher place
 You believe in power,
 in communication
 You believe in energy,
 light
 You ask me to trust myself
 to listen to these
 tangled voices
 I wake in the night to
 write strange, disconnected
 words
 In sleep I look out windows,
 open doors
 I travel; I leave
 I continue to find my way back
 I find others who recognize me
 You remind me to watch for
 desert signs
 You nudge me forward.

March 19, 2000a

There are no mistakes
 I have not been ready until now
 I think, I know it is time
 to feel, to move, to let others
 know who I am - to choose
 a way to live, to commit
 to my growth, my life.

I will not be afraid to breathe
 I will go into this moment,
 the next moment
 aware of my emotional self -
 ready to meet my
 spiritual self - to give it space

to speak

I belong here now
 I belong
 I listen; I listen.
 I experience the truth of words:
 I am an artist
 I write; I feel; I express;
 I create; I give

There will be no hesitation
 A candle burns in the center of the circle,
 the center of me
 I am not alone, have never been alone
 This thought leaves me here,
 now

March 19, 2000b

I do not stop being surprised
 when I do step forward
 There is no coincidence
 of this I am certain
 This is a leap for me -
 far from home
 I have left my friends
 There is sunshine here -
 not the rain and clouds of the coast
 that covered feeling

Here, the sun, the season uncovers me,
 opens me and I hear
 over and over,
 the voice:
 yes, yes, yes, yes, yes -
 you are walking into moments
 you are smiling into seasons
 you have begun to give back
 you are learning to accept

I hear this music in my ears,
 down in my ears
 it resonates within my throat,
 this song I have

been silently singing since
forever

I feel who I once was, who I
still am,
who I will be

The cool sun air shines on me

March 19, 2000c

There is not competition inside
my skin now
I move back; I move forward
no matter which -
all time is important -
all moments exist together
I feel pain again
I feel the fear of this pain,
I miss my mom again and again
I lose time and think her here
think her at home,
ready to receive my call to her
She is alive when I fall back -
there is comfort in this
She is also alive when I choose to
move forward
She lives in me
in my breath, in my skin,
my face, my hair.

April 6, 2000

Tonight the sky and my world changed
I walked into the sliver of a new moon
and found it bathed in pink light
In the darkness, I walked
with eyes in the stars -
the sky a source of shifting
darkness spilling a pink glow
towards the moon
I was a witness to a sky
I have never seen -

clear with bright stars,
 coloured with energy,
 flowing, moving
 I waited for a second witness
 and only moments passed
 before someone approached
 We stared into the pattern,
 awe-struck, dumb
 We shared time, energy, voice
 We exclaimed, questioned, accepted
 We became connected

I believe now in the power of vision
 I feel change all around me
 We moved, shifted, transformed
 We stood, face to the moon
 I walked home electrified

I will not forget this sky,
 this energy, this promise
 of miracles
 I see, I feel, I am
 The moon reminds me
 to be amazed
 to wonder
 to forgive
 It lights healing colour
 across darkness
 It covers me with a mauve beauty
 I see the road, the darkness
 differently.

April 9, 2000

To let you go confirms that you are truly dead
 You will not pick up the phone when I call you
 You will not listen when I am sad
 But you are here in this place with me -
 You do not fill an empty space
 in my body,
 in my spirit
 Rather, you are an excess of love and compassion
 within me

I watch myself become your face in the mirror -

the curls, the grey in my hair are
 a legacy of you
 My tears here fall easily, quickly
 There is no holding away
 this release

I have taken you with me
 around the world - I have breathed in the
 mountain air for you
 To let you go does not mean giving up
 this memory of you
 I can carry your words with me, your smile,
 your easy way of giving to make
 others happy

It is so easy to recall the awful things
 I said to you
 the times I turned away
 from gifts you brought to me
 You offered me what you could
 I was never sure how to respond
 to your generosity, the ability
 you had to make yourself
 less important than me,
 than anyone else
 You were not less important
 You were a center, a holding, a stone.
 I so wanted you to love yourself
 all the softness in you.

To love you wholly, openly was so difficult
 for me, a giving away.
 I love you now, today, truly,
 with no anger,
 no judgement
 I love your silliness, your every way
 I see that giving and vulnerability
 and openness are not weakness -
 they are strength

Your love, your willingness to trust
 was strength
 I take that with me
 Thank you, thank you,
 thank you

April 19, 2000

I lie on the table,
 a stranger holding my belly, my head
 I inhale with my mouth open,
 a wave of breath and suddenly
 my mom is there, with me
 holding my heart within the palm
 of her hand -she touches her hands
 to my cheeks, so softly
 she kisses me on the chin,
 on the right cheek,
 left cheek, the forehead
 She whispers, let go, let go, let go
 She whispers that I am beautiful
 She is free; I am free
 So many tears, energy moving
 from my legs up my hips,
 surrounding my torso, my heart, my head
 and then I feel her again,
 pure light energy,
 her cheek against mine,
 listening, within me
 I open my eyes to another woman's face
 my mom's eyes looking back
 I see her there, and her soft voice
 (you are beautiful)

May 8, 2000

To Elaine Kelly on her birthday

You are the quartz pebbles
 beneath my feet
 as I continue
 to walk, walk
 You are the delight
 within my voice
 as I sing
 You speak to me through
 the water falling
 over green rock
 You touch me gently
 when I weep
 when I want

to scream
 I want to scream,
 to weep today,
 this day when
 I celebrate you
 Still, I smile when I think
 how you loved
 this earth
 You gave yourself to
 the leaves,
 the trees,
 the life around you
 You lived,
 you lived
 I live today
 I embrace the emotion,
 the fear,
 the knowing
 I embrace you
 Accept the gift of
 my gratitude,
 my love,
 my admiration
 I love you,
 I miss you,
 I celebrate you.

May 23, 2000

My heart opens (closes) opens
 My toes curl into solid ground
 My arms, my fingertips move through
 the sighs of my breath
 I travel entire continents of my body -
 I become more confident in
 many different
 languages

 I change moments and skin,
 (still with difficulty)
 There is movement within
 the stillness, the center
 I have discovered
 within my body
 I continue to learn to wrap myself around

this stillness
 I feel full and empty
 allatonce
 I lean in closer to myself
 (I lean away)

The tears remain in my throat,
 behind my eyes,
 within my teeth
 at night

These emotions move,
 move,
 move

My eyes listen to the opening
 (closing)
 of my heart

I feel a tightness pulling strands of my hair,
 reminding me,
 reminding me...
 (breathe)

I begin to recognize my face in the mirror
 I hear water move
 I hear my voice within me
 I am here
 I am here
 I am here

May 29, 2000

A dream with my mom and my sister,
 my mom so young and vibrant,
 my sister so soft and gentle telling mom
 that it is time to share the secrets,
 withheld information

Mom is unsure,
 but she begins to tell me
 I say nothing -

I am a vessel of listening,
 of soaking in the power of
 her magic,
 the gifts of her stories,
 her world.

There are firecrackers and girls are
 running to escape the danger

I, instead, anticipate
 the beauty,
 the light.

June 3, 2000

I curl my legs under me
 book open upon my pillow
 listening to music created
 for me
 remembering people, events,
 love, actions
 feeling energy push against
 the walls of my chest
 the bars of my ribs
 I can't name the feeling,
 this feeling I have felt before
 I spend time within the
 confines of my
 head - I think,
 consider, reconsider
 I speak on telephones in
 order to sleep
 just a little longer
 in order to lay my
 head carefully on this
 soft pillow
 I write words in the hopes
 of capturing meaning,
 understanding,
 clarity
 I want to know this
 inner world that
 eludes me
 I move into the center of
 this fear - I
 stand still for moments
 looking behind my
 shoulder
 I will walk through to
 the other side of fear
 to the unknown
 moments still to come
 Now, I hesitate;
 I catch my breath

I remember
 I remember the friendship
 I have developed
 with fear - the secrets
 I have shared, the
 time we have spent
 together
 I look ahead now -
 I step gingerly
 I let my fingers
 slip one
 by one
 from the strong
 hand
 I have
 held for so long

June 8, 2000

These days of shifting patterns
 of music in my ears
 of deafening sound
 I feel ground moving under me
 I feel unsteady,
 time twists in the
 strangest ways
 I reach into corners,
 relying on touch
 where the darkness
 presses in
 I reach gingerly,
 carefully
 I find spaces,
 energy swirling in
 tight spirals
 I find longing for connection
 fear of intimacy
 I am worthy
 I close my eyes and repeat
 the words, repeat

June 13, 2000

The secrets of my life, my mother's life
 are a fault line
 running through my life
 I asked others to walk the fault
 with me, to risk the earth moving
 beneath their feet so
 they would understand
 my experience
 I repair the fault in these days,
 these months of healing
 I will no longer ask others
 to sacrifice safety
 as proof of their love
 I love the new ground I create
 and I trust others will
 choose to walk with me
 will feel the solidity,
 the safety
 of me

June 14, 2000

I am here, open and aware
 of the movements within my cells
 I have been held by my mom
 once more
 She returns to visit,
 to calm me
 I feel again the loss
 My body remembers
 sleeping with her,
 curled into her
 I am aware of the tightness
 in my throat, the hardness
 in my chest
 I cover my face with my hands,
 with a blanket
 I uncover,
 I uncover.

June 25, 2000

Tonight the sky demands,
 demands - the clouds
 reach through and down
 The rain pushes with strength,
 intensity, energy,
 reminding me to breathe,
 to breathe
 I sit at my window and
 I listen to the colour
 the lack of colour
 I hear the wet leaves
 the soft bark of trees,
 weary soft covering
 My life changes, changes
 I shift directions,
 shift directions
 I consider my own leaving
 I am presented with gifts
 of such value
 I catch myself
 smiling, holding
 breath in, letting it go
 I will return to my home
 to hold myself
 in a still moment or two
 I will listen to rain again
 on different soil
 I will return

November 9, 2000

I dream of your face,
 unclouded, clear
 You are travelling away,
 journal in hand
 You wear clothes that suit you
 You will travel to India,
 to meditate,
 to practice
 You are full of life,
 excited, independent
 You do not need me -
 I smile at your energy,

your youth
 You are delighted to see me
 (calm)
 we are calm
 I feel this ache for you,
 for this you
 this soul you
 You visit me in the netherworld
 of sleep to touch
 my face
 You smile as I wake
 and you continue
 your journey
 I love you, love you
 I hear your message:
 I am courageous and
 adventurous,
 open-hearted, balanced,
 grounded, whole
 I am open to change and
 a healthy, sacred love
 I am full of life, of you,
 of depth and energy
 I open my eyes

November 10, 2000

You left me behind a
 thick pane of glass
 within the noise of
 this left-over family
 You left me to watch
 my own reflection within
 the darkened glass
 You left me to lie wide-eyed
 listening to the
 silence, to the
 unbearable noise
 I feel the nausea of
 memory, of loss
 the weary clenching
 of my jaw
 I hear the music,
 the pulsing of bass
 the treble within my throat

I fear the music,
 the sound of screams
 the loss,
 the loss
 You left me to interpret
 the noises within me
 the noises within others
 I asked for something,
 some sign, some guide
 I listened to the empty
 pulp-mill sky
 for answers
 I did not know how to
 hear the response
 I did not know
 I looked for you and
 you were a voice on the phone,
 a dark figure behind a
 steering wheel
 snow spiraling into
 the glass before you
 I resist the beat of strong
 music - the reminder
 of fear, of loss,
 of threat.

October 15, 2002

I sit beneath a tree-
 I sit on a gentle slope,
 cross-legged.
 And the wind is not gentle –
 it reaches around and
 through me – it threatens
 to expose the sharp
 pain in my right shoulder.
 I welcome the invasion;
 without thought, I invite
 the movement, the
 dramatic, elemental push
 against my closed skin.
 I think I can hear within
 the noise a promise,
 just within reach.
 I have spent the week

avoiding the sharpness,
listening instead to
the softness of breath.

Today, I do not hesitate.

I feel the restlessness, I
know the source of
these fears – I go into
the jagged muscle of
my back where blade
meets skin and
within moments
I know.

You are with me –

finally and completely
I feel your body
behind me and I
do not resist –
I lean into you.

Your cheek is soft like I
remember and you
take the weight of
these years away.

And I realize that
my voice has become
connected with the
fury of these winds –
it rises, twists, tears itself
from my back and
chest – it breaks
around itself, cracks
and falls and carries
me into you,
into myself.

I do not know if the voice
I hear is within me
or whether it is
around me – I do
not care.

I hear you,
finally and completely
you have found me
found a way to
touch me through worlds,
through moments,
through me.

You speak to me so

clearly, so solidly.
 You feel my words before I
 think them, you touch
 me in a space beyond
 words.
 I hear your bubbling laugh
 and you recognize my fear –
 that love is scarce,
 that I need to guard
 against this scarcity.
 Your sweet mother voice
 within me
 (so certain, so amazingly
 strong and calm)
 shares knowledge –
 the truth that love has
 no limits, cannot be
 measured, cannot be
 lost
 that you are with me today
 and yesterday and
 around me, within me,
 beside me
 You are with me today
 and I feel you smile at my
 relief that this moment
 has reminded me of
 beauty and possibility
 and that you, you
 have never left.
 And that love includes me.
 In this moment, my life
 becomes fluid,
 remarkable,
 beautiful.

October 28, 2002

Power and fear and strength
 these words connect in
 my chest,
 in my gut

I am not certain if I know what
 the word

hero weighs
I have not held it in
my soft palms

I am certain that I no longer hide,
no longer constantly
apologize, no longer always
feel afraid and angry,
no longer spit bitterness

Too often the sting ran
down my own chin,
fell onto my own breast

(Too often)

Today I begin to create my own
family in a quiet space,
a clean white space

I write words as he drives
through salt wet streets,
guitar on the rear seat,
smile on his face,
song on his lips

love

January 27, 2003

Wedding - December 24, 2002

Today I wear the blue of
Central American
waters

I pull my auburn hair back
expose the tenderness
of skin, the slope
of my shoulders

The wind gusts today
I feel you within the
folds of blue,
your wedding colour,
a memory of you

You are not here
today as

we smile into the
 roundness of sun
 into each other

I know you would
 smile too
 (cry)

I know you would cry

This year I do not cry
 eight full years
 (empty)

You would cry to see
 me smile,
 to see me

To see you
 I would
 to see you here
 today, smile
 my whole self
To see you here today

February 8, 2003

I sit, legs crossed, eyes
 closed, shaded
 beneath a palm,
 straight, tall

Wind brings the salt
 of water to my body
 (a reminder)

I begin to be acquainted
 with certainty,
 a certainty that moves
 through and around me

I sit surrounded by sand,
 (not soft, not white)

I travel within the
 borders of this new
 country, at once
 unfamiliar and safe

I open my eyes
I see the soft blue
 of sky touch the shifting

changing colours of
water
Here, there are no tourists
On this hurricane-damaged
peninsula
I see no one
Yet within my skin
the certainty becomes
a stillness -
I am no longer alone
I am no longer afraid
I close my eyes
a stillness

February 13, 2003

I want to believe that it was not you
who visited me in this dream
There was anger, so much
anger at you
There was a portrait of our family
I was not included
I yelled and screamed and
left the room
I watched as you left for work again
I felt ashamed, forgotten, empty,
hopeless
I want to believe it was not you

May 6, 2003a

These lines are pulled taut,
pulled to breaking,
(not broken yet)
My arms stretch behind
me, fingertips pulsing
with movement,
with blood.
My chest curves open,
(resistance)
an awkwardness, a stillness
I consider releasing myself
(you) forgiving myself
(you) celebrating myself

(you) (me) living
without you
(with you)

I love you now,
not clearly, not without
complexity

I feel the pads of my
fingers begin to break
connections

I wonder how I felt I
could save you
from hurt, how
I continue to
feel I can save you

You are dead (years, years)
I do not know what this means
I do not know

I do know that I arrive home
to music and skin and
absolute love

I do know I need to be held
the way you held me
(the way I was not held)

I do know you disappointed me;
You loved me anyway
despite my disappointment
(loud, obvious)

I disappoint myself sometimes
(I see how damaging
this judgement can be)

Today, I try to be honest;
I begin to feel power,
energy, movement, change,
happiness

I am afraid of the beauty
I touch within and
around me

I am afraid to lose you
I feel this fear and

I choose to listen to the reminder:
 I live; I change; I love;
 I let go (slowly, carefully)
 I embrace
 (joy)

Thematic Analysis

Five major themes presented themselves to me across the poetic data. One of the pervasive themes that occurs in many of the poems is Questioning and A Search for Meaning. The questions within the poems evolve into a search for an understanding of loss and a search for a truth within loss. From this theme of questioning arises also the dichotomous theme of Holding On or Letting Go, which is debated and explored and questioned within the poems. I analyze this theme as it connects to the fear associated with a perceived loss of the mother-daughter relationship after death. I also analyze this theme as it connects to the potential for developing an ongoing and enriched relationship with loved ones after they die. The complexities of the physical loss of my mother and the longing for physical and emotional contact with her even after her death give rise to the multi-faceted theme of Connection. I also include within this theme the potential power of the spiritual elements of connection. The theme of Breath and Body is intertwined with the physical, emotional and the spiritual experiences of connection and trust. The theme of Voice(s) developed as I wrote the poems and continues to develop as I write this chapter. Within this theme, I explore my complex relationship to words and language and expression - both the futility of words and language and the sometimes terrible and sometimes beautiful power of words and language.

Questioning and A Search for Meaning

The very first poem that I wrote after my mother died questions the very act of writing poetry: "How can I describe how I feel?/ How can I transfer this pain to the page?" (February 2, 1995). I felt absolutely alone, even questioning the companionship that words and my journal once brought to me and also questioning whether an audience could possibly understand the power of my emotions. In fact, I wrote only nine poems about my mother and her death in that first year. Words did not seem able to document the intensity of this loss.

My mother was the one person to whom I had revealed myself at this point in my life. It seemed unthinkable that I could possibly connect in this way to any other person: "How can I relate my world/ to another human being?" (July 9th, 1996). The questions within my poems were my attempt to cope with the intense fear I felt when I lost her: "the fear is overwhelming,/ the pain, the sense of being alone" (March 9, 1995). In some way, however, the very act of questioning created a sense that there might be answers somewhere, and each question served as a vehicle through which I could voice my uncertainty, through which I could voice my need to know.

The questioning became in these poems a search for meaning and a search for connection of some kind. In the first six months after my mother's death, the questions became a large part of my identity: "My life is so many questions,/ a continual search" (May 31, 1995). The questions I had and still have are not only connected with death and fear, they are also questions concerning all of the aspects of my mother and her life that I do not know and may never know now that she is dead and "now that vacuum of no answers, of not knowing stretches infinitely" (April, 1995). Many of the questions that

echo through these poems reflect the regret I felt for not asking questions when my mother was alive.

In 1999, I decided that I wanted to know more about myself, about my mother. I was compelled to begin this search after I became intimately involved with the man who is now my husband. As I began to reveal pieces of myself to him (slowly, carefully), I realized that I was ready to know more about my mother and more about myself. When he left to travel on a journey of his own, I journeyed to the city of my mother's father (also the home of my partner's parents) in order to explore some of the areas of my mother's life that had been unknown to me, in order to listen to the stories of my great aunt and great uncle:

I will ask questions...
to add depth and contour
I will allow the whispers
of other lives
to enter into me. (July 25, 1999)

I allowed the questions to be a guide and I chose to follow and to listen to the narrative fragments of my mother's life, of my own life. In listening to the stories of my mother's family, I began to feel connected to her again, began to recognize that her narrative continues through me and my life. I began to understand the power of continuity, the legacy of story within families. I began the process of change, the opening of my mind and my heart to the possibilities within loss and I began to truly honour the commitment I had made when she died that "this time I will begin to live" (May 31, 1995).

The questioning also became a tool for me to understand the process of grief itself as I struggled with the dilemma of pain. As I considered the journey ahead, I asked, "Must I go through?/ Must I miss you?" (July 9, 1996). Behind this question was the

beginning of an understanding that grief is a process and that I now lived and moved within this process: "I attempt to move outside of the shape,/ outside of the grief,/ but it doesn't end" (March 9, 1995). The process of the grief now became merged with the process and the journey of learning and growth and change in my life.

The very act of questioning revealed to me that there are certain mysteries within this life that cannot be explained, that cannot be understood: "Who can say they know/ when it seems/ unfathomable" (July 9, 1996). Despite this acknowledgement that I do not know, cannot know, the questioning continued in my poetry, a need within me to make some sense of the fact that this woman that I loved so deeply had physically disappeared from my life. I continued to ask the question "where are you?" (March 21, 1997). I found it such a challenge to understand both why she was gone and what had happened to her mind, to her emotion, to her: "I ... ask questions/ no one can answer" (February 25, 2000).

The intuition that perhaps my mother still existed around me eventually began to emerge in my poetry. I began to sense that I could connect with my mother through the natural world around me and I was able to begin to explore this hope within the lines of my poems:

It feels as if you have always
 been here
 I feel you in the warmth of sun
 breaking through clouds. (March 21, 1997)

I spent a good deal of time alone in the first three years after my mother died and I turned slowly inward and tentatively explored the power of my intuitive self. I began to develop the conviction that I was somehow connected to my mother still, even though this belief existed alongside the doubt that "I don't know if such/ a thing is possible" (October 21,

1998). The questioning shifted with time as my poetic voice began to explore with wonder the inherent possibilities of loss. I began to connect to a place within myself, a passion, a power: "I believe there is a love/ I have been forgetting" (November 15, 1998). I began to understand that "there are answers/ within my skin" (August 9, 1999a) and I began to develop a willingness "to listen/ to understand" (September 6, 1999), a willingness to "watch for /desert signs" (February 25, 2000). I had been told by others all of my life that I was too emotional, too focussed, too intense. Yet, it was these very qualities that enabled me to stand still and to reach inside myself. It was when I began to explore the idea that my mother "lives in me" (March 19, 2000c) that I opened into trust and began to "touch this life" (April 25, 2000) rather than question it so anxiously. I journeyed into uncharted areas of myself in order to live, in order to understand and I began to slowly unravel the complex layers of self: "I uncover/ I uncover" (June 14, 2000). I found along the way a stillness within me and a depth and energy of "beauty and possibility" (October 15, 2002).

Letting Go/ Holding On

One of the most complex struggles which is reflected within my poetry is the ongoing question of how to let go of my mother after her death. Soon after my mother died, I began to explore whether to let go or whether to hold on to my relationship with my mother, my relationship with the grief itself and my long-term relationship with all of the emotions that I carried with me from my past. The theme of letting go and holding on is prevalent throughout many of my poems and each time this struggle surfaced, it carried with it the erroneous belief that I had some kind of control over the grief itself and over relationships themselves, the belief that I had the power to decide when to let go or hold

on. This illusion that I could somehow control my life was comforting and perhaps necessary for a time in light of my fear of deep connection and my fear of loss. I eventually began to recognize that all of my relationships are ongoing across the boundary of life and death and that even after death, these relationships will continue to exist and will continue to shape me.

Losing the physical presence of my mother was shocking to me. I spent my entire life holding on tightly to my mother and when she died, this loss was profound. The need to continue to hold on to her physical being was very powerful: "I try to hold onto you, all that is you - even if that means holding onto the painful memories as well" (April, 1995). I struggled to maintain the connection even when I knew that she was physically gone, and I reassured myself with my words that my mother is a part of me, that she is within me: "I see you in me ... / You will stay inside me/ I watch my face become yours" (May 1997). My words and my poetry became a way of connecting and holding onto the belief that even as I lost the physical comfort of my mother, I maintained a relationship through my words: "I write this ... / as a way of being/ closer to you somehow" (October 21, 1998). There was and is a comfort in the physical manifestation of words on the page.

Within the pages of this poetry, I have documented my struggle to understand the concept of letting go. My words reveal my confusion. What does it mean to let go of someone we love when they die? I am not sure where I learned that it is important and necessary to "let go". It felt as though there was a cultural expectation that I let go of my mother and I did not know how to do this: "If I could have you back for tomorrow ... / I think I would not be able to let you go/ That is always the learning for me" (May 7,

1997b). The underlying belief behind these words is that I somehow have control over the leaving and the loss of my mother.

I felt a paralyzing fear when I considered what letting go might mean: "To let you go confirms that you are truly dead" (April 9, 2000). I began to resolve this struggle when I distinguished the letting go of my mother as a physical presence in my life from the letting go of the hurt and pain and anger associated with my chaotic past: "The loss does not pass -/ it continues to shape me -/ I do not mind/ letting go of who I was" (August 16, 1997). Rather than letting go of my mother and all that she represented, the letting go became an opportunity to re-visit and resolve some of the complexities of my relationship with my mother and with other members of my family. Ultimately, letting go became a transformation of self, a shifting of emotion and priority.

Even as I began this thesis, however, I still questioned whether I was holding on too tightly, whether I was too focussed on my mother and her life and her death, or whether, by researching my mother's death and my grief, I would be letting go and perhaps even losing my connection to her, losing her. I worried that as I became happier, I would no longer be connected to my mother because in many ways, our relationship originally developed in an arena of grief and sadness. At the same time, I felt the release that comes from a letting go of blame and an opening up to the joy of life:

I consider releasing myself
 (you) forgiving myself
 (you) celebrating myself
 (you) (me) living
 without you
 (with you)...

I am afraid to lose you
 I feel this fear and
 choose to listen to the reminder:
 I live; I change; I love;

I let go (slowly, carefully)
 I embrace
 (joy) (May 6, 2003a)

I learned that the letting go could actually be a release, a forgiving, a celebration. The letting go became a softening of the anxiety connected with trying to let go. I learned (and learn again and again) that I need not try to control the world around me in order to avoid the pain of losing again. The letting go became a form of opening and accepting. It is after one of my most intense experiences with a bodywork session that I experienced a profound connection with my mother and an intense release: "She whispers, let go, let go, let go ... / She is free; I am free" (April 19, 2000). In the letting go there was and is a freedom. In the letting go, there was a freedom from control and anxiety and there was a freedom from the attempt to grieve in some prescribed manner, a freedom from the expectation that grief should end.

Very soon after my mother's death, I became aware of the paradox that the loss of my mother, the most important human being in my life, might also prove to be the gift of freedom, the opportunity to transform, to shift, to change and "stop this cycle of pain" (April, 1995). Despite my fear of losing my mother completely, even within that first year it was clear to me that this movement forward into a life of my own was not necessarily a movement away from my relationship with my mother: "now I can make a conscious choice/ to move forward, to look forward/ because I know that forward isn't / away from you" (May 31, 1995). My choice to move forward included the acknowledgement that my relationship with my mother would continue and that it would also continue to shift and to change and to develop. I began to believe that my mother lives both in memory and in the present:

I move back; I move forward
 no matter which -
 all time is important -
 all moments exist together...
 She is alive when I fall back...
 She is also alive when I choose to
 move forward (March 19, 2000c)

I have become fascinated with the relationship between time and loss. I do not understand the relationship, but I do know with certainty that my mother continues to exist in some way and I do know that our relationship continues to change and to reshape itself.

I discovered that my mother's death provided me with a potential release from the difficult, more painful aspects of my past. I yearned to let go of the built up anger inside of me. Writing this anger felt like a betrayal of my mother. Often, this emotion arrived in confusing dreams which I attempted to document. It is still difficult to express the darker emotions that I carry within me: "I want to believe that it was not you/ who visited me in this dream/ There was anger, so much/ anger at you" (February 13, 2003). As I voiced and uncovered some of the sharp, frightening places within myself, I gradually began to let go of the shame and I began to heal.

Through the opaque glass of my grief and through the intense fear of abandonment that I learned in childhood and that my mother's death had resurrected, I had the epiphany that my mother had never abandoned me: "you will be forever falling/ in this city of salt and/ water/ you never left me/ you never even/ considered it" (November 22, 1999). Within this poem, I connected the image of the rain with my mother's spiritual presence and the cleansing water is a symbol for the transformational power of death and the possibility of rebirth. That my mother continues in some form

beyond my understanding became the reminder that I need not hold on with fear and panic and that I can soften into change: "I see you in the faces of others ... / I stop myself from holding on tightly/ to strangers/ I hold myself on this night" (September 12, 1998). There is a shift here from holding onto the presence of my mother to holding onto myself. This is one of the most profound shifts of the past nine years, this learning that I hold within myself all of the comfort and love and power that she gave to me and it is this realization, over and over, that allows for the letting go of fear:

the wind turns outside
the rain stops...
I will no longer be afraid
I walk out onto cobbled
pavement
my feet tender on the
cold wet tiles
a terror builds,
subsides. (January 14, 2000)

Once again, it was the rain and the wind that cleared and inspired and reminded me of the tenderness of my courage. I felt during this time a solidity and from this grounded place within myself, I finally felt able to rely on myself, my choices, my emotions. I began to trust in love and relationship and I ventured forward into new relationships. Within this opening, I began to connect with my mother in a new way, I began to explore a relationship with self and with my mother and with the world around me, and I began to touch the idea that she exists both within me and around me in the natural world.

Connection

The most pervasive theme within my poems and within my life is the theme of connection. This theme encompasses physical connection, emotional connection, and spiritual connection. Over time and with the writing of my poetry and with the writing of

this thesis, I have been reminded that there is an inter-connectedness between the physical, the emotional and the spiritual. I have believed this intellectually for many years, even before my mother died. My experience with loss and grief has strengthened this belief.

When my mother died, my overwhelming impression was that I had lost the physical presence of my mother, my friend, my confidante. It was the absence of this physical connection, the touch of her voice and her soft skin that was terrifying to me: "I keep listening, hoping to hear/ someone beside me, holding me,/ enveloping me" (February 2, 1995). I felt an enormous sense of need for her physical presence, for her comfort. My dreams were filled with strange images of my mother, both dead and alive, and I would wake in the mornings shocked with the knowledge that she was not accessible to me any longer:

and the phone pulls me
 awake,
 left with that
 empty
 space -
 left with her eyes
 and the knowledge
 (inescapable)
 that she is
 (dead)
 no longer with me (August 8, 1996)

Within the dream world I felt connected with my mother, even if many of the dreams were strange and convoluted and full of emotions I found difficult to understand. I became terrified of the realization that would find me as I woke up each day: "I cannot wake to the/ morning without/ fear of all the/ other mornings/ without her" (May 7,

1997a). The mornings would find me disoriented and I would feel the shock of discovering that she was dead - again and again.

After my mother's death, it was the absence of her physical being that was the most profound struggle for me: "I spend my/ life, now,/ without you" (December 11, 1996b). When I remember my mother, I remember mostly the incredible sense of comfort I had when I was in physical contact with her and the memories within my poetry are full of images of this physical connection:

I curled myself
into the space
you created with
your bent legs -
even after I
no longer fit,
you created space
for me - (December 11, 1996b)

I feel just as powerfully today the loss of her body holding me and creating space for me to feel, for a moment, safe. In fact, it is finally the sorrow itself that became a substitute for physical presence within my life:

Sorrow is a physical being
I touch it as I sleep
I brush by it on the stairs ...
I face it in the reflections
of self in the window, the mirror, the toaster
my face distorting beyond recognition (December 12, 1996)

My longing for connection with my mother made it difficult for me to connect with myself and the image of my face distorting in reflections exemplifies how disconnected I felt from myself in my fear and sorrow and pain.

I could not believe that any other physical connection besides the body of my mother could soothe and offer me an emotional connection and my heart became closed,

inaccessible: "I cannot remember how/ long I have been/ closed; how often/ I have pushed/ others away" (May 7, 1997a). I felt a fear of being alone; however, I also felt the fear that if I did connect, I would quite possibly experience loss. These fears were devastating in their damage to my trust in self, in love, in others: "I avoid my friends./ I feel uncomfortable in my own life./ You are missing" (May, 1997). There was a danger that this loss could separate me from others and ultimately, from my own faith:

I experience this doubt,
 this lack of trust,
 this inability to believe
 that anyone could know the pieces
 of my heart (July 2, 1997)

My mother had always confirmed for me, even in the confusion of family disorder, the certainty that I was loved, that I was loveable. I had faith that she knew who I was and that she loved me unabashedly, unconditionally. Her death created a crisis of confidence for me and I began to question whether anyone could know me and whether I wanted anyone to be as close to me again, particularly if I were to lose them as well.

For years after my mother died, I felt overwhelmed with emotion and felt disconnected both physically and emotionally from the world around me: "I feel the temptation/ to pull away - to be alone/ I feel alone anyway/ even when I am/ surrounded by others" (October 21, 1998). I felt the intensity of the sorrow as a warning to both myself and to others: "I carry the pain ... / holding it in front of me/ to ward off intruders,/ to warn off trespassers" (July 9, 1996). When I realized that not only did I miss my mother, but that I also "miss[ed] myself" (October 21, 1998), I saw beyond the physical loss of my mother and the emotional disconnection I felt from her and I felt a profound disconnection from myself.

The shock of this discovery prompted me to realize that the depths of my emotion were not necessarily a liability: "I believe in this power I have/ to feel and express" (November 15, 1998). In 1998, I was reminded of the power and depths of my emotion when I began a new relationship. I connected deeply within this relationship and when he and I continued on separate journeys for quite some time, I found myself valuing moments spent alone. Once I was able to connect to the love within my spirit, I found myself also connecting powerfully once again to all of the emotions of love and loss that I felt for my mother. However, emotion became for me a source of power in this new paradigm, and the time that I spent alone on my journey became healing and full of potential to change, to transform:

I will feel the spaces
 within me
 shift
 I will feel
 me
 the power of alone (June 10, 1999)

It became more apparent to me during this time of discovery that the journey of my grief could provide me with the potential for a spiritual exploration, and with this realization, I began "to see the/ other/ possibilities" (June 10, 1999).

As I opened myself to the possibilities of a deeper connection with self, I became aware of the possibilities of connection with the world around me and ultimately, a deeper connection with my mother, whom I re-discovered both within me and around me:

You are the quartz pebbles
 beneath my feet
 as I continue
 to walk, walk
 You speak to me through
 the water falling
 over green rock (May 8, 2000)

I began to open up to the world around me in order to discover my place in this world, in order to begin to understand who I am and how I connect. In this opening, I began to re-experience the pain of losing my mother: "The tears remain in my throat/ behind my eyes/ within my teeth" (May 23, 2000). However, this time, within the pain, I also began to feel the beauty of joy and of love: "I will not forget this sky.../ this promise/ of miracles/ I see, I feel, I am" (April 6, 2000). The words of my poetry contain the paradox that I have discovered throughout this grieving process - that love and loss are connected inextricably and that when we love deeply, we experience within this love the profound pain of loss. And within the pain of loss, there is the potential to rediscover the depths of love and trust that exist within us as human beings.

Breath and Body

I feel both the pain and the fear of loss within my entire body. As my mind struggles to understand loss and to decipher grief, my body signals to me, attempts to dialogue with my mind. This dialogue, this attempt to communicate is evident within the words of my poetry. It was during the intensity of my grief in the months of December and May that I discovered I had difficulty breathing. Certain times of the year have been more difficult and more painful for me in the process of this grief. December is a difficult month both because my mother loved Christmas and because she died on January 1st. May is a difficult month because of Mother's Day and because my mother and I both have our birthdays in the month of May, two days apart. During December and May, I wrote more poems than any other months and during these months, I felt and continue to feel the loss of my mother most intensely. In these heightened emotional months, I struggled to understand how my mother could die and how I could still live.

We had been so connected while she lived, that it seemed unfathomable that I could somehow continue in living form once she did not. I had spent my entire life in an effort to protect my mother. I watched over her, I worried for her, I mothered her. Deep within the cells of my body, I felt this refusal to believe that I was no longer necessary: "my scarred lungs/ still breathe" (December 11, 1996b). Although in this first December after her death I acknowledged that I could breathe, it was a damaged breath, a painful inhalation. By the following May, I felt very little movement within my lungs, within my body:

I draw breath inward
 But my lungs refuse to fill
 the air remains
 still
 within me (May 6, 1997)

Without a complete inhalation of breath, my body was without energy, without vitality. The breath felt as though it were blocked from fully entering my lungs and the air within my lungs felt stagnant. I felt that I had very little purpose after a life that was so intricately connected with my mother's life - her decisions, her tragedies, her mistakes, her love for me.

Metaphorically, I felt as though I had died as well when my mother died and even my body seemed to stop functioning with ease. There did not seem to be room within my body for the breath:

Tonight I feel full
 of emptiness - this
 space crowds inside of
 my closed chest.

(I cannot breathe still). (May 7, 1997a)

The emptiness within my chest began to take up enough space to make breath seem impossible. Alternatively, the space within my chest was so vast, so immeasurable, that there could never be enough breath to possibly fill the space: "I feel this/ hollowness in my body" (October 21, 1998). I believe now that my chest may have been closing down to protect my heart, to hold it safe, deep within the space of my body. This inability to breathe was perhaps the defense of my body against the fear of death, both my mother's and my own.

Breath is a symbol of life, of power, of movement. Time is measured by each inhalation and exhalation, and over time, with each laboured breath that my body continued to take, I began, perhaps for the first time in my life, to feel the power of breath:

I move into my own
 future
 minute by minute
 I have come to realize
 the breath of my
 lungs moves me
 forward
 I will do what I can to
 be extraordinary
 to live meaningfully
 I will be inspired (August 9, 1999b)

Breath became a motivator for me, an inspiration. The word "inspire" is intricately connected with breath and with the poetry that I write. With each breath came the possibility of living fully and passionately:

I will not be afraid to breathe
 I will go into this moment,
 the next moment
 aware of my emotional self -
 ready to meet my
 spiritual self - to give it space

to speak (March 19, 2000a)

Breath connected the physical, the emotional, the spiritual within my poems and within the process of my grief. It became the signal, the catalyst for awareness, and this awareness of emotion and spirit became for me a commitment to growth and transformation.

As I began to explore the connection between breath and spirit, I began to explore with my words the connection between breath and the spirit of all beings, including my mother: "She lives in me/ in my breath (March 19, 2000c). This exploration led to the faith that my mother lives on within me, within my body, within breath. I began to see the connection between breath and faith, mystery and imagination:

I inhale with my mouth open,
a wave of breath and suddenly
my mom is there, with me
holding my heart within the palm
of her hand (April 19, 2000)

Through my breath, I began to see the possibility of continuing the relationship with my mother. We were intricately connected through breath - she gave me life and breath. I began to trust. With each wave of breath, I began to understand that I could reach into myself to connect with my mother. With each breath, I felt the deeper connection of my spirit to something natural and powerful:

The rain pushes with strength,
intensity, energy,
reminding me to breathe,
to breathe (June 25, 2000)

The more I became connected with the strength and energy of the natural world, the more I recognized the significance of each moment of my life, and the more I realized the immensity of this web of connections. Over and over again, I struggled to control my

life, my world. Over and over again, I made the difficult choice to surrender to not knowing, to the power and to the softness that I discovered with each breath. And with each breath, I learned to connect to my own body, to listen to the messages hidden within the cells of my skin and deeper.

As breath found its way into the spaces of my body, I began to know myself, learning to feel my physical self as connected to my emotional self, to my intellectual self, to my spiritual self. I had relied on my mind for so many years, that it was a shock to discover this whole other world of my body:

I travel entire continents of my body -
 I become confident in
 many different
 languages
 There is movement within
 the center, the stillness
 I have discovered
 within my body (May 23, 2000)

I made the amazing discovery that my body was a whole world to be explored, with entire languages to be learned and I began to gain confidence with this journey. Within the movement of my body, I found a still place, a place where I could listen and finally connect to the wisdom that I have always carried within me:

I travel within the
 borders of this new
 country, at once
 unfamiliar and safe...
 On this hurricane-damaged
 peninsula
 I see no one
 Yet within my skin
 the certainty becomes
 a stillness -
 I am no longer alone
 I am no longer afraid (February 8, 2003)

Ironically, I discovered that I am not alone within myself. The more intimately I grew to know my body and its movements and its passions and its stillnesses, the more I discovered how fascinated and full of wonder I could be with the world around me and the world within me.

I also discovered the contradiction that the closer I felt to my body and my heart, the more I discovered that I could be further away than I had believed: "My heart opens (closes) opens ... / I lean in closer to myself/ (I lean away)" (May 23, 2000). I discovered that I still felt fear when I moved into my grief, when I allowed myself to move into new love and connection. This discovery only solidified my desire to learn to know myself, to experience a relationship with myself and to learn to experience a relationship with others.

In the moments when I allowed myself to trust, when I allowed myself to listen, I was able to hear the wisdom of my body. I was able to believe in the power around and within me:

And the wind is not gentle...
 I feel the restlessness, I
 know the source of
 these fears - I go into
 the jagged muscle of
 my back where blade
 meets skin and
 within moments
 I know.

You are with me -
 finally and completely (October 15, 2002)

When I took a risk and allowed myself to feel the pain in my body, to feel the pain of grief and loss, I discovered that I was given many gifts. I was able to feel all of the warmth and goodness and generosity of spirit that was my mother. I was able to connect

to the amazing legacies of her spirit within my life. I was able to move with an open heart into relationship, returning from my literal and metaphorical journey into the sacred space created for me within my partner's life. For two years, from autumn, 2000, to autumn, 2002, I did not write poetry about my mother and loss; rather, I lived within this new love and my poetry celebrated this new connection. When I was willing to take a risk and live fully with myself, I learned the truth that "love has/ no limits, cannot be/ measured, cannot be/ lost ... / and that love includes me/... [and] my life/ [became] fluid,/ remarkable,/ beautiful (October 15, 2002).

Voice(s)

For a time after my mother died, just as it felt as though I had no breath, it also felt as though I had no voice. I wrote very little about my experience with grief and loss. In the first year after her death, I wrote only seven poems. These poems are short and fragmented and reflect the shock that I felt for years (still feel) knowing that my mother is dead. It surprised and disappointed me, too, that people generally seemed uncomfortable if I wanted to speak about my mother and about death and they (not so gently) worked to shape me away from discussing my grief. As I discovered just how challenging it was to voice my grief to others, I began to write my experience, to rediscover my own voice within my journals.

My poetry explored the complexity of finding a voice within grief. Part of this complexity was my fear that my mother had lost her voice forever. I struggled to understand the meaning of this loss. I knew with certainty that I missed my mother's physical voice: "to be so aware/ of the absence of a phone call,/ the absence" (May 6, 1996). I knew that my world had changed because I could not hear her speak to me any

longer: "Without your voice, my world is varying shades of grey./ I haven't seen colour in a very long time/ I miss your voice awfully" (May, 1997). I also knew that I wanted her to hear my voice: "I continue to pray/ I hope somewhere my mom can hear me" (May 6, 1996). My mother was my private audience. I chose to voice myself to her when she lived. Thus, when she died, I lost the one person who had recognized the voice of my heart and reflected it back to me: "It all doesn't seem to matter as much/ when I can't tell you about it" (May, 1997). The loss was a double loss: I lost the voice of my mother and I lost the mirror for my own voice.

I turned to poetry as a way to voice my pain, my confusion, my sorrow, my anger. I turned to my journal as an audience for my words. As I wrote, I often felt my inability to express my grief with words: "I understand that words do less/ than I plan" (December 11, 1996a). I felt the futility of words. There seemed to me a disconnection between my intellect and my emotion. It felt impossible to express the depth of my experience. Even as I felt my own inability to voice my loss, I became aware of those around me who had also experienced loss: "I begin to hear the voice/ of sorrow (muffled)" (December 12, 1996). I began to feel ways in which my grief connected me to the grief within others, but I still felt separate, still felt unheard.

I felt a need to escape from the voice(s) of loss and sorrow, from the realization that this loss would shape me, would continue to shape me:

I cannot turn my head away
from the sounds of voices
 in my ear
whispering in a language
my mind cannot
 translate
words I do not understand (May 6, 1997)

Loss was like a once familiar language that I did not want to re-learn, that I did not want to practice. I could hear the sounds of words, but I did not want to be able to translate the meaning of this loss. I was immersed in the dialect and shape of this language, and eventually the words began to carry meaning - my mind began to understand whole phrases:

And I hear the voices again
but I understand now
the words -
simple, hollow, impossible -
I will never hold her,
will never be held (May 7, 1997a)

I resisted this message for as long as I could and when I finally listened to these voices I felt the power of both my mind and the language to create fear, to find a niche for sorrow within my life: "Forlorn is a word I/ create today - it defines/ itself within/ my body" (May 7, 1997a).

For a long time, the concept of voice seemed separate from me, outside of me. I resisted fully expressing my sorrow, and I was unable to find my own voice: "Tonight I hear the/ tears I cannot/ cry - I feel the heavy/ weight within/ my throat" (May 7, 1997a). I definitely did cry often, but the weight of the sorrow seemed to remain in my body. All I knew was to continue to write, to continue to find a way to express myself:

I love you
I miss you
I write these words so you will
see the testimony
so I can read the words
the solidity of words I have
always loved so much (May, 1997)

Not only did words serve as a vehicle for the expression of my grief, they were also a verification of my love, my grief, my loss. They were a reminder, a bridge for the power of my voice.

However, even as I felt the solidity of words, the comfort of language, I was also aware that words alone could not heal me:

Where there were once words,
 now, there is only empty page.
 I feel I cannot possibly fill
 the space ...
 I read these words,
 these letters
 and there is no meaning ...
 and I feel the futility of words. (July 2, 1997)

There were moments when I felt trust, when the words could create a kind of safety for me and there were also moments when I felt doubt, a crisis in faith, an inability to believe that my voice, my words could adequately voice the depths of my loss, the extent of my grief:

Sound fills my throat until I can do
 nothing but let it out ...
 my voice gets lost
 in the dark air (November 28, 1999)

In the moments when I finally felt able to voice my sorrow, I felt that I was not heard, that my voice was lost.

With each word that I wrote in my poems, I made a commitment to listen to my own voice and I began to trust that I would learn from this process of writing and listening:

You ask me to trust myself
 to listen to these
 tangled voices ...
 I wake in the night to

write strange, disconnected
words (February 25, 2000)

I began to listen to myself, to be the audience that my mother once was, to mother myself. I began to hear music again: "it resonates within my throat,/ this song I have/ been silently singing since/ forever" (March 19, 2000b). This pure voice of song connected me to my grief, to myself, to my mother.

Once my voice was unfettered within the poetry, I was able to explore the complexity of my grief, the fact that I could want to scream and laugh within moments: "I want to scream/ to weep today,/ this day when/ I celebrate you/ Still, I smile" (May 8, 2000). Through the passion of both tears and laughter, I began to feel that my voice also contained the voice of my mother: "You are the delight/ within my voice/ as I sing" (May 8, 2000). When I was fully able to connect with my own voice, I felt connected to the voice of my mother and I felt the power of release:

my voice has become
connected with the
fury of these winds -
it rises, twists, tears itself
from my back and
chest - it breaks
around itself, cracks
and falls and carries
me into you,
into myself.

I do not know if the voice
I hear is within me
or whether it is
around me - I do
not care.

I hear you...
Your sweet mother voice
within me (October 15, 2002)

My voice broke out of my body in the space that was created by silence. The power of my voice connecting with the power of the wind created magic, and within this magic, I found the connection to my mother:

you have found me
found a way to
touch me through worlds,
through moments,
through me. (October 15, 2002)

I re-discovered my own voice and I re-discovered my mother's voice by listening and by connecting my power and fury and passion with the power and fury and passion of the natural world around me.

Transformation of Self

I began this journey into the words and images and themes of my poetry in order to explore the nature of transformation. I stepped outside of time to look back, to venture inside. I feel myself as I return to this moment, as I re-surface, and I experience a sense of vertigo, a dizziness. I step forward within this body and I look around myself. I ask myself how I see the world differently today. I still question. I still search for understanding, for meaning. I touch my skin to remind myself of trust and stability.

I continue to let go of the guilt connected to my feelings of relief and freedom when my mother died, connected to my feeling that I did not do enough when she was alive, connected to my feeling that I was not enough. I know now the power of releasing this guilt, of acknowledging the emotions I carry within me. I have felt the loss of my mother all of my life. I have struggled with judgements about who I thought my mother should be and wasn't. Over time and through the writing of poems, I learned to forgive her for her leavings, to forgive her for her mistakes. I learned to experience her as

human. During their twenties, many young women move away from their mothers in search of a separate identity (Myers, 1986; Rando, 1988). They then have the opportunity to re-establish connection with their mothers and move into the wholeness of friendship. I believe that I have been moving through this developmental task, which was interrupted with my mother's death, and I have created and continue to create a different relationship with my mother. I still negotiate what often felt like the enmeshment of our previous relationship. I still try to hold on, to let go.

I have developed the ability to see myself as both separate and whole and also to see myself as deeply connected to my mother. I loved my mother with such a protective, fierce complexity that when she died, I was deeply afraid to love again and to lose that love. As I have healed, I have learned to trust in the power of an open heart. I have learned the deeper healing that can be manifested within relationship. I have opened myself to the possibilities of love, intimacy and connection. I have learned that patience and stillness are qualities that I continue to develop. I have learned that I am lovable, and that I am capable of loving without losing myself, without fear. I have learned that I am not alone, was never alone. I have learned that I do have a home and that my mother is connected to that place within me where my sense of home originates. I have learned that it is not imperative that I find definitive answers to the questions that I ask. I have learned in the power and in the mystery of the unknown.

I listen. I write. I speak. I voice the complexity of my grief. I bring myself into a place of discovering who I am, who I always was. Even the structure of my poetry reveals the transformation of self over time. The early poems are more simple, stark, tight. The poems move toward an increasingly more complex structure. I use more of

the space on the page, which signals an opening, a choice to take a place on the page and in this world. I take more risks with punctuation, using more brackets and dashes, a mirroring of the risks I take to reveal my depths, to explore my grief, my passion, my relationships, my life.

I have moved from a place of tightness, from an inability to breathe, into movement, and fluidity and back again. I have discovered cycles of movement in my life - certain times, particularly May and December, when my grief is more intense and my breath becomes constricted once more, and my body becomes closed and tense and anxious. Today, I do find that I am more willing to listen to the wisdom of my body, more willing to move within the rhythms of grief. I am more aware of the healing power of breath and connection.

As I write, I am humbly reminded that I do not always feel the certainty of connections. I do not always allow my body movement and expression. I do not always feel the power of voice and passion. Yet, I do continue to write and to document the moments when I feel connected, when I feel my mother within my own voice, within my own body and all around me. It is the quieter power of this writing voice that reminds me to believe in the possibility of magic, the possibility of connection.

May 6, 2003b

Who are you, I ask and
ask (again)

You live between spaces
within my body

Your lost voice
is at first a tickle,
a scratch in the back
of my throat

Today, it begins to sound
itself against tender
purple walls,
it begins

My own voice cracks around
the raw emotion
of your own
I whisper,
I scream,
I sing

And you (I sing)
and you
are with me again,
beside me,
holding me

And my voice becomes
my own,
and yours

Chapter Five

Discussion

January 4, 2004

There are so many layers to
this writing,
this memory,
this grief,
my body,
my life
I peel translucent pieces -
like skin after
intense sun,
sometimes pulling
off in fragments,
sometimes lifting in
one perfect whole
I reveal myself moment
by
moment
I discover you in the
most unlikely corners
of my mind,
my body.
I see you in the eyes,
the faces
of others
I see you in my own face,
within my
own face
I spend time with you
in the pages of
this writing
I spend time
recognizing

The purpose of this study was to explore my own development and transformation as I continue to grieve the unexpected loss of my mother. The following question served as a guide: How do the writing and the reading of poetry both reveal and transform the self with regards to the experience of mother-loss? The results of this study illustrate the process of grief as a lived experience over the course of nine years. Within this chapter, these results are compared to the existing literature, and recommendations are made for future considerations within counselling practice and future directions within counselling research. I conclude with a reflection on the process of this research and the dynamic nature of grief and transformation.

Connection to the Literature

The poems within this study have documented the process of my grief over time and thus offer a unique opportunity to gain insight and clarity into specific moments of grief as I experienced them. The poems have also facilitated my process of grief by serving as a sacred space for the voice of my grief within a culture that does not support the open, candid discussion of death and loss and pain (Davidman, 2000; Foote & Valentich, 1996; Kubler-Ross, 1975). The poetic results of this study support the literature which documents the healing power of voice within the grieving process (Bolton, 1999; Edelman, 1994; Foote & Valentich).

One of the most significant findings that emerged from the results of this study is that grieving is an evolving, living process that does not seem to have an end. Although the grief documented within my poems changed shape and shifted and moved over the course of nine years, the power and presence of my grief did not disappear. This finding supports the mother-loss anecdotal and research literature which suggests that grief does

not seem to be time-limited in that as women change and grow, they often re-live their grief as they are faced with different developmental milestones (Edelman, 1994, 1995; Pill & Zabin, 1997; Rando, 1988; Worden, 2002). This finding also corroborates the literature which suggests that grieving is not a truncated series of set and specific stages; rather, grief seems to shift and move and shape itself differently over time (Dietrich et al., 1999; Edelman, 1994, 1995; Rando, 1988; Worden, 2002).

The grieving documented within my poems appeared to be a moving in and out, an opening and a closing, an exploration of self as well as a deepening and a strengthening of my relationship with my mother. The shifting, developing relationship with my mother seemed to be a second significant finding in this study and supports the existing literature which suggests that daughters who have lost their mothers often reassess the relationship with their mothers and embrace the possibility of an ongoing relationship (Dietrich et al., 1999; Edelman, 1994; Grumeretz, 1995; Kranz & Daniluk, 2002; Pill & Zabin, 1997; Satlow, 2002). The evolution of my grief included all of the messiness and risk and delight that arise from an inquiry into self, that arise from re-negotiating relationship. The poems revealed the complex relationship that I had with my mother - the value of her legacy of warmth and goodness, and also the value of my anger, which served as a catalyst to move me deeper into myself, where I find (over and over) the strength to resolve conflict, and the emotional and physical energy to re-negotiate this central relationship with my mother as well as other significant relationships in my life. Negotiating and integrating what was the best of my relationship with my mother into my life was a critical and ongoing piece of my grief work. My experience was similar to the

women in Kranz and Daniluk's (2002) study who also searched for ways to resolve old conflicts with their mothers and to integrate the best of their relationships into their lives.

Walters (1992) suggests that daughters are encouraged to move away from a close and intimate bond with their mothers even when both are still alive. She notes that daughters are expected to be independent and to move away from the mother-daughter connection. She contends that we need not let go of our relationships with our mothers and that we can continue to celebrate connection and intimacy and even ambiguity within this most central and significant mirroring relationship. The results of my research indicate that my development as a young woman is still connected to my mother in many ways: she is still a factor in my decisions, my celebrations, my losses and she is still present spiritually in my life within and around me. My research findings thus support the literature, which explores the possibility of re-establishing relationship, of deepening the relationship with both the lost loved one and with self (Davidman, 2000; Edelman, 1994; Pill & Zabin, 1997).

A third significant finding that was revealed through my poems was that much of the emotional intensity of my grief was manifested as a visceral experience. The physical impact of the grief was one of the central themes that emerged from the results of this study. Some of the grief and loss literature suggests that grief does have an impact on the body in terms of eating and sleeping patterns and also suggests that the physical effects of grief within the body may in fact be one of the reasons that individuals are referred to therapy (Myers, 1984; Rando, 1988). However, the research literature on grief and loss does not fully explore the embodiment of grief and the power of the connection between the breath, the body, the mind and the spirit. What emerged from my poetic data was the

literal connection of breath and body to my experience of loss and to the process of my grief. I discovered that my body experienced my mother's death at a physical, perhaps even a cellular level that I could not fully understand intellectually. Within my poems, I explored this connection between breath and life, between breath and death.

Stephen Cope (1999), a psychotherapist and theorist in the field of yoga psychology, documents in his anecdotal literature the "critical role of the body in ... development and transformation" (p. 198). He notes particularly the connection between breath and body and healing: "Because the breath is so intimately connected with the emotional body, any attempt to inhibit awareness of feelings, sensations, and thoughts is immediately reflected in the breath" (p. 207). Cope explores the power that the breath has to open both the body and the emotions and to reintegrate "sensations, feelings, thoughts, and memories" (p. 209). He notes that it is important to explore the subtleties of the breath and body connection, since "we must know the body's language in order to understand its message" (p. 238). Consistent with Cope's contribution, the poetic results of my study offer a unique contribution to the mother-loss literature in that they have documented my journey into breath and the body. They document my initial struggle with the simple and powerful act of breathing, they record my willingness over time to witness breath and listen to the messages of my body, and finally they reveal a potential awareness within me, an embracing of breath as a voice of wisdom from the body, from the soul. That my grief manifested itself as a visceral experience offers valuable insight into the richness of an embodied experience of grief, which may well be critical to understanding the depths of the grieving experience.

A fourth finding in my study is that the loss of my mother brought me face to face with my own mortality, my fear of the unknown, my fear of death. Satlow's (2002) study documents how mother-loss for young adult women shapes the unfolding of their development. She discovered that young adult women in her study were faced prematurely with their own mortality following the death of their mothers. This conclusion is corroborated within my poems by my own reflections and fears connected to my own death. Foote and Valentich (1996) also document the finding that daughters feel that they become the "older" generation when their mother's die, whether they are ready to take on that role or not. Kranz and Daniluk (2002) interviewed women who had lost their mothers in mid-life and they report that these women discovered that there was "no longer a buffer between themselves and death" (p. 8), and this discovery was a significant part of their experience of profound loss. Edelman (1994) also explores the fear that women feel when they lose a parent and the last line of defense against death is gone. My mother's death was off-time and part of the experience of my grief was coming face-to-face with my life without her and with my fear when faced at such a young age with the inevitability of my own death.

Grumeretz (1995) goes as far as to suggest that an awareness of one's mortality is the gift that can lead to acceptance and eventually to an understanding of the meaning connected to the process of grief. This claim fits well with another finding of my study in terms of my awareness that grief is not necessarily only a loss. For me, it was also an opportunity to explore and to transform my relationship with self and my relationships with others. Some of the research and anecdotal literature has explored this potential for growth and exploration inherent within the process of grieving (Dietrich et al., 1999;

Edelman, 1994; Foote & Valentich, 1996; Kranz & Daniluk, 2002; Pill & Zabin, 1997; Viorst, 1986). In their longitudinal study which explored how people find meaning through loss, Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Larson (1998) suggest that there are two distinct types of meaning making: meaning as sense-making and meaning as benefit-finding. Family members who were receiving hospice services took part in both pre-loss and post-loss structured interviews. Davis et al. assert that whether a person is able to make sense of death seems to be unrelated to whether a person is able to find something positive about the experience. Their findings suggest that over the long term, it is the ability to find something positive in the experience of loss that strongly influences adjustment. Specifically, they note that learning about personal strength and gaining insight into the importance of relationships actually alleviate feelings of loss and helplessness. After writing and reading the words of my poems, I suggest that I have not fully accepted the death of my mother and that I do not fully understand the complexities of loss. I have come to accept that I do not understand life and death and that I cannot control all things around me. Even though I have not been able to make sense of my mother's loss, I have experienced growth and transformation. Learning to accept the mystery and the not knowing continues to be one of the most profound pieces of this journey of grief.

At least one researcher has explored loss as a positive opportunity to explore the mystery of death and the possibility of interconnectedness (Douglass, 1997). When my mother first died, I had a glimpse of the possibility of freedom and movement and exploration. Over time, I experienced profound depth within me and I experienced the vastness of the human spirit. I discovered that the more I explore my emotion and my

body and my grief, the more I realize that it is impossible to predict, impossible to know. Even so, I have experienced the gift of connection with my self, with my mother, with my partner, with my friends, and with the natural world around me, and each time I experience these connections, I become more certain that I am not alone. The knowledge that I am connected has given me the strength to open my heart and my life to the possibilities within relationship and friendship.

Perhaps the most powerful finding to emerge from my poems is the transformative power of witnessing my grief through finding a voice. Given that the process of grief continues over time and may involve an exploration of self and relationship and breath and body, my poems explicate the potential power of writing within the grieving process (Bolton, 1999). Narrative and poetry provide a continuity over time (Richardson, 1997), a voice that continues to express, a voice that continues to celebrate the ongoing relationship with those who die and the ongoing relationship with self (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Thus, the poetry within this study not only revealed my self, but also transformed my self both as I wrote the words and again as I read the words and as I shared the words with others. I discovered the strength of my voice within the words of my poems. Writing these poems was a testament to the intense emotions of my grief. The poems revealed the incredible depth of this loss for me, and the despair and pain that live within me. They revealed the confusion and the questioning associated with loss and the need to make sense of this loss, a theme that also exists within the research literature (Kranz & Daniluk, 2002; Pill & Zabin, 1997). The poems revealed the vacuum that was created in my life when I lost my mother. These findings support the research and anecdotal literature which suggest that mother-loss is one of the most

significant and profound losses for women (Davidman, 2000; Edelman, 1994; Foote & Valentich; Kranz & Daniluk, 2002). My poems offered me the opportunity to express this loss and to create a voice for myself within my grief.

The voice of my grief and the words that I wrote originated from a place beyond my intellect. Richardson (2000a) has suggested that poetry is a unique writing experience precisely because it is created on a visceral level and "touches us ... in our bodies" (p. 931). Consistent with the claims of Bolton (1999), all of the poems that I included within this study were first draft poems, written from an intuitive place within my body, written with faith and with trust that the shaping of words can nurture and heal. The words created an opening through which I could develop a willingness to explore, and eventually a willingness to share my words and my grief with others. Allowing others to witness my grief was and continues to be an important piece in my process of growth and transformation. Foote and Valentich (1996) underscore the importance of witnessing grief, of voicing the loss in some form and Davidman (2000) suggests that by sharing our experiences, we can help others to witness their own grief and perhaps help others to find some solace, some personal meaning within their own experiences.

My poems have become for me a gift that I choose to offer to others, a manifestation of trust in relationship, trust in process, and trust in growth. The questions within my poetry acted as guide for me within the process of grief and prompted me to search for meaning and understanding. These questions began to tease apart the societal messages and expectations that teach us that letting go and moving on are necessary after we lose someone that we love. It was in the letting go of these expectations that I was able to allow myself to grieve more fully. I was able to listen without the noise of

silencing. The words of my poetry connected me to my inner experience, connected me to another realm of possibility, to a sacred space where I could breathe. The words of my poetry served as a bridge to understanding the transformative power of both breath and body. Richardson (2000a) asserts that poetry is connected to the body and emerges from a deeply intuitive place. Within my own poetry and within my own experience, breath and body seemed to serve as a bridge and a connection to spirit, to a new universe, to a reminder of the beauty of mystery and the unknown. Breath and body and the words that emerged from them acted as a reminder of the potential for growth and movement within my body and within my life. Within this space, my experiences gained clarity and moments and words became magic and truth.

Implications for Counselling

This study addresses a gap in the research on mother-loss, namely the experience of transformation for a young adult woman who has lost her mother at a particularly sensitive developmental stage of independence, growth, and experimentation. I have documented the multi-layered experience of my young adult grief through the poetry I have written, through the wording of my grief, and in doing so, I hope that I have informed the mother-loss and grief literature on a level and depth that has not been articulated to this point. My research may provide counsellors with a window into the personal, particular experience of unexpected mother-loss during young adulthood and may offer important insight into the process of grief over time.

The findings of my study suggest that as counsellors, we can develop an awareness that grief evolves over time and that our clients who have experienced loss may well carry this grief in its different shapes throughout their lives (Edelman, 1994,

1995; Kranz & Daniluk, 2002; Rando, 1988, Worden, 2002). Early research on grieving (Kubler-Ross, 1975) suggests that grief is experienced in a sequence of six stages and assumes that grief is time-limited. My findings indicate that it seems quite possible that grief continues with no definitive end. It seems quite possible that a client who has lost a loved one years ago may still experience, at times, intense grief. We need to understand, as counsellors, that in the case of some losses, grief may not end and that a client who has experienced a loss 10 or 15 years ago may still be experiencing grief from or about that loss.

When we work with women who have lost their mothers, therefore, we need not seek to help them end the grief; rather, we can help them to find a way to create a different relationship with their lost loved one and with themselves. The results of my study suggest that a woman can continue to explore the complexities of the mother-daughter relationship even after her mother's death. As a grieving daughter changes and grows, her relationship with her deceased mother can also change and grow. It is important to note the power a client can discover if she can free herself from the societal expectation that she must move away from her loved one and end the relationship that she had with her mother before she died (Valentich & Foote, 1998). It is also important to note the profound source of comfort and mother-love women can find within themselves. As counsellors, we can help women to recognize this valuable resource within themselves.

The findings of my study also reveal the visceral nature of the grieving experience. As counsellors, we can become more aware of embodied grief. The journey into the body and the process of engaging in a dialogue with the voices of the body open

a world of possibilities for the practice of working with grieving clients. Given that my review of the grief and mother-loss literature found only brief references to the significance of the body in the experience of grief (Myers, 1984; Rando, 1988), my study reveals an important area that we may be overlooking in our work with grieving clients. In his clinical experiences with relaxation and stress-reduction workshops, Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) has worked with meditation and the body as it connects to stress and illness and he notes the important role that both breath and body have in healing: "All ... facets of our body's experiences are doors through which ... we can catch glimpses of our own wholeness.... [and] feeling whole ... nourishes us on a deep level. It is a source of healing and wisdom" (p. 162). Likewise, Cope (1999) suggests that healing takes place when we listen to our bodies and begin to discover how to use breath and meditation and when we allow the body to fully relax. There is amazing potential that exists within the field of counselling to acknowledge the body within sessions and to facilitate an awareness of breath and the language of the body. This study reveals that awareness of breath and body can facilitate the process of grieving and it can provide important information about where clients may be getting stuck and about how they are experiencing their loss. Both breath and the body can become vehicles through which we can access depths of emotional experience and through which our clients can begin to discover a symbolic voice and perhaps even a deeper connection to self and, ultimately, to others.

The findings suggest also that grief forces us to look at our own mortality. It is important for us to be aware that grieving clients may well have fear connected with their own death as well as with the death of a loved one (Edelman, 1994; Foote & Valentich,

1996; Grumeretz, 1995; Kranz & Daniluk, 2002; Satlow, 2002). The research suggests that whether we lose our mothers when we are teenagers or young adults or mid-life adults, we experience the knowledge that we are the next generation to die. It is important therefore that we explore the fears connected with mortality no matter the age of the client when her mother died. In order to understand the potential depth of this fear, it seems important that as counsellors we make a commitment to explore our own grief experiences. Given that all therapists and indeed all human beings will eventually experience loss and grief in their lives, it seems important also that we become informed about our own process of grief and about our feelings connected to loss. When we trust in our own process, we may be able to provide our clients with a safe space from which they can also trust in the grieving process. I feel that this study has contributed to my own understanding of self and I have been a witness to the process of my own grief and growth and transformation. My personal exploration and my commitment to witness my grief have offered me a gift for my own work with clients. The depth and intensity of my inquiry has reminded me of the depth and intensity my clients may experience when they inquire into their own losses, their own grief. I am reminded that we are all connected - that I am a mirror for my clients and that they are also a mirror for me.

The findings of my study also remind us as counsellors that there is potential for gain within the experience of loss (Dietrich et al., 1999; Edelman, 1994; Foote & Valentich, 1996; Grumeretz, 1995; Kranz & Daniluk, 2002; Pill & Zabin, 1997; Viorst, 1986). Our clients may not be aware of the potential for growth and transformation that comes with an experience of this magnitude. Rather than solely focussing on the losses inherent within the grieving experience, we can help our clients to discover self-

awareness and self-exploration, and we can help them to live passionately and fully in the face of their own mortality. A significant part of the counsellor's work with grieving clients is to help clients find their own gains, their own meaning through their losses.

Finally, my findings suggest that voicing the emotions connected to grief is an important part of the grieving process (Davidman, 2000; Foote & Valentich, 1996; Kubler-Ross, 1995). In finding a voice for myself, I wanted also to encourage discussion, and to encourage others to create voice(s) for themselves around and through the shame and silence that often surrounds death (Davidman, 2000; Valentich & Foote, 1998). Within my own process of grief, poetry and self-reflection provided me with avenues through which I could explore the emotions and the struggles and the celebrations I experienced while working through my grief. I was able to express my frustration, my questions, my fears, my hopes. Although a significant piece of my self-reflection and growth came from the initial writing of the poetry, it is important to note the transformative power of re-visiting these poems and reflecting on the content, the messages, and the repeated themes. It was also tremendously healing to share these discoveries with an audience. The literature supports the use of narrative and poetry within self-reflection (Bolton, 1999; Cahnmann, 2003; Richardson, 2000a). I suggest that we support our clients in voicing their grief in any way they choose. As counsellors, we can help clients to find their own vehicles for the expression of self and grief, including any expressive tool. Each client brings with them their own ideas and their own preferences and it is important to inquire and explore with the client the vehicles that suit them best in working through voicing their grief.

In light of the importance of voicing grief and the importance of sharing this grief with witnesses, we cannot underestimate the potential power of group therapy for women who have lost their mothers. Pill and Zabin (1997) explored the power of the group experience for women who lost their mothers and contend that members of a group connect with others through voicing their grief and through witnessing the grief of others and that it is the connection and the voice and the witnessing that can facilitate healing and transformation.

Implications for Research

Given the impact that my mother's death had on my body and my life, it certainly seems important to conduct further research into grief and loss, both in light of the ongoing nature of the process of grief and in light of the potential for growth and transformation which revealed itself within my experience of loss. The results of this study reveal that grief is a process that is experienced over time. Given the significance of time to my process of transformation, longitudinal research could explore the experience of grief over time for other women in order to explore the rich diversity of experience within other lives, within other experiences of loss and grief.

My autoethnographic study was limited to my personal experience of sudden, mother-loss as a Caucasian woman of 28 years. Given the limitations of race, age and gender in this study, further research could explore the process of grief and transformation through the use of poetry giving consideration to other factors. For example, a study could explore the grieving process for women from different ethnic backgrounds. As well, a study could explore the differences and similarities within the process of grief for women of different ages who face different developmental tasks.

This study documents the silencing of grief within North American culture and the importance of finding a voice within grief (Davidman, 2000; Foote & Valentich, 1996; Kubler-Ross, 1995; Valentich & Foote, 1998). It seems important then that researchers also explore the challenges that face men who are grieving, particularly given that we seem to live in a culture in which men particularly are expected to be silent and strong in the face of adversity and loss.

Another limitation of this study is that the process of my grief was naturally connected to the relationship that I experienced with my mother prior to her death. Although my relationship with my mother was complex and complicated, we had a close, loving relationship. I suggest that researchers could inquire into the grieving experience for women with a focus on the nature of their mother-daughter relationships prior to their mothers' deaths. This links to and is supported by the finding of Kranz and Daniluk (2002) that women who had more complicated relationships with their mothers prior to death had more difficulty with the grieving process.

My poems reveal that I have experienced growth and transformation and healing in connection to my meaningful, intimate relationship with my partner. The depth of love that I discovered within this union had the power to open my heart and my body to profound healing. Given my experience, research could inquire into the readiness and willingness of men and women who are grieving a significant loss to engage in relationships, the readiness and willingness of these men and women to open their hearts and to invest once again or to continue to invest in intimate connections. Researchers could ask whether investment in relationship allows for a shaping and transformation of relationship with the lost loved one. In my study, relationship was a catalyst for my

growth, my openness, and my willingness to live fully and passionately. On the other hand, healing the loss of my mother and developing an ongoing relationship with her also seemed to create more room for me to embrace more fully the intimacy of relationship. Given my finding that grieving and relationships evolve over time, longitudinal, qualitative research could explore the interplay between healing and relationship - whether healing our losses allows for deeper relationship and/or whether deeper relationship heals our losses.

The results of this study offer insight into the potential for poetry to document the process of grief, to facilitate the process of grief, and to provide a space within which one can discover a voice for grief and share this experience of grief with witnesses. Given that poetry both facilitated my own grief and created space within which I found a voice for my grief, further research could explore the potential healing power of poetry and narrative when used by grieving women as a vehicle for discussion, healing, and insight. It would be fascinating to explore different forms of writing that might serve as vehicles to document the process of grief and transformation for clients who have experienced loss.

Researchers could also investigate other vehicles for the expression of grief that are used by women and men to facilitate the process of grief. The results of this study document the power of breath and body in connection with healing and growth. Given that my process of grief was integrally connected to my breath and to my body, researchers could inquire into other vehicles connected with breath and body that could potentially facilitate the grieving process. Given the significance of my visceral

experience of grief, research could specifically examine the in-depth experience of embodied grief through either qualitative or quantitative methods.

The results of this study offer insight into the process of my grief as one young woman who has experienced mother-loss. I have entered into an experimental form and method of research - autoethnography - that is not common in the field of Counselling Psychology. It is my hope that in pushing the boundaries of tradition that a new method will be acceptable and even desirable for some students and faculty who would like to explore an alternative avenue within the field, who would like to voice their worlds in a unique way. This narrative approach illustrates that knowledge can be connected with resonance. Through the vehicle of poetry, my research is able to offer the gift of the embodied knowledge of grief (Richardson, 2000a). This narrative approach reveals multiple selves, multiple witnesses, and multiple perspectives for any given experience (Richardson, 1997). I believe that all human beings share in the human condition and I agree with Ellis (1996) that "every person has in himself the entire human condition" (p. 161). Eventually, all human beings will experience grief and loss and death. This study documents my trust in the journey, my trust in the wisdom of the self, my trust in the process of grief, and my trust in the process of the universe. Certainly, this study documents my commitment to a trust in the existence of shared truths. Narrative approaches to counselling research open possibilities for the artistic spirit within all human beings - the voice of experiences and emotions and truths (Cahnmann, 2003; Ellis, 1993, 1998; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 1990a)

After-images of Grief and Process

I am not certain how to describe the process of putting this thesis together, the process of this grief. I have been aware of this pull towards, inward. I have moved in and out of myself, in and out of my poetry, in and out of this prose. I acknowledge that this process has been a personal and emotional challenge. I am aware of my many selves and my many perspectives. I am aware that I change gradually, almost imperceptibly. I am aware that I change suddenly, without warning. I am aware of how momentous this project seems to me. I feel the worry deep in my belly that I have not captured my experience, that I have not captured the depth of this process, the power of my experiences, the complexity of relationship.

I am aware as I write this thesis that the words and the conclusions that I make are influenced by the woman that I am becoming. I am aware today that the death of my mother was a gift of profound proportions and that my poems document that I have been able to accept many aspects of this gift. I have learned to understand that my relationship with my mother and with myself is ever-shifting and is a part of an ongoing journey.

The loss of my mother continues to be the most difficult experience of my life. In this way it has not changed. I still feel the pain of her loss at Christmas and on our birthdays. I still miss her every day and want to call her when I feel bereft and lonely or when I feel proud and celebratory. More than anything, I wanted her with me at my wedding- to see me in love and happy:

To see you
 I would
 to see you here
 today, smile
 my whole self
 to see you here today (January 27, 2003)

There was not any magic that could take the place of her physical presence with me when I chose to commit my heart to another human being.

And this spring, I needed her voice when I experienced another profound loss in my life: I lost my first child at the end of the first trimester of pregnancy. I am aware that this loss has touched me deeply and I am reminded of the fear, the absolute terror that I had when my mother died. I only wrote one poem in the first two months after my mother died and I understand once again the amazing power of grief. Once again, I feel that my life has been suspended and that I am close to touching death. I feel again my inability to describe the shock and the emptiness and the loss with the keys at my fingertips. But mostly, I feel again my fear of death, my fear of not knowing, my fear of change and movement. It is my absolute fear of death that both paralyzes me and motivates me. And I understand again that my mother's death was the beginning of learning how to feel deeply, of learning how to accept that change is inevitable, that life is a cycle. I recognize once more that with each loss, I have a choice: to stop moving or to continue to live fully with heart and body and spirit.

This past week I felt again the tightness in my chest, the closing of my throat that signals my birthday, my mother's birthday and mother's day. I have not found a way to prepare myself for this feeling which announces itself as a visitor each year. I am caught off guard once more and this surprises me, particularly since I have been immersed within the process of grief all year. This year, I felt again the cycle of emotion, the power of this loss. I was reminded again of how difficult it is to let others celebrate me, to be fully present within this grief. I was also reminded again of the love that surrounds me.

I continue to learn and to trust. I continue to question and to doubt. I continue to miss her. I continue to lose and to find myself within the grief I experience. I commit again and again to voice and expression, the sweet power of words and emotion.

May 8, 2004

Today is your day
 I write these final
 words and I think
 of you, of your birth,
 of your death,
 of this re-birth
 (mine, yours)
 I sit in this room
 and the sky is blue
 outside the window
 I breathe in the air that
 moves through the
 the open door
 the scent of lilies
 and daisies
 moves into the
 cells of my body
 and I sigh
 with sorrow
 with fatigue
 I offer this simple
 poem to you
 I smile
 I love
 I am loved

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